

# Fasting in the Early Church

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# 1 Introduction

In our class, one of the disciplines that we discussed using for our spiritual development is that of fasting. This discipline has been treated quite thoroughly by the Church Fathers, yet Foster (the key source of our study) does not take advantage of a single ancient document outside of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> While this does not hurt the *Celebration's* purpose, it does fail to tell us why it is the tradition of the church to practice the discipline of Fasting. I think that in order to learn why and how and when the Church is to Fast, we must look at those who formed our doctrine and practices.

## 1.1 Definition

Fasting, according to the signification of the word, is abstinence from food. Now food makes us neither more righteous nor less. But mystically it shows that, as life is maintained in individuals by sustenance, and want of sustenance is the token of death; so also ought we to fast from worldly things, that we may die to the world, and after that, by partaking of divine sustenance, to live to God.<sup>2</sup>

Fasting, or going without food is then by the definition given more than just the act of going without food – but is symbolic as well of sharing in the death of Christ. It is one of the physical signs of our salvation – for not only do we die to that which is of the world, but we (with Christ) receive “food that you do not know of;” divine substance instead of that of the flesh.

From the definition that we receive from Theodotus – one thing that we realize (and that he brings up later in the same paragraph) is because fasting is a symbol of the disciplined life – one lives a life of fasting from those things of the world. All that involves abstinence is thereby related to fasting.

## 1.2 Purpose

Not only is fasting a symbol of the disciplined life, but is one of three methods of participating in Holiness – as Augustin writes:

This is now our righteousness in which we pass through our course hungering and thirsting after the perfect and full righteousness, in order that we may hereafter be satisfied therewith. Therefore our Lord in the Gospel (after saying, “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them”) in order that we should not measure our course of life by the limit of human glory, declared in his exposition of righteousness itself that there is none except there be these three, – fasting, alms, prayers. Now in the fasting

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*. San Francisco: Harper, 1978, reprint 1998. ISBN: 0-06-062839-1, pp. 212-213.

<sup>2</sup>Theodotus. “Excerpts of Theodotus or selections from the prophetic scriptures”. In: *Ante-Nicene fathers*. Vol. 8: *Fathers of the third and fourth centuries*. Ed. by A. Cleveland Coxe. Trans. by William Willson. American Edition. Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 1886, reprint July 1999. Pp. 39-50. URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf08.iv.iii.html>, p. xiv.

He indicates the entire subjugation of the body; in the alms, all kindness of will and deed, either by giving of forgiving; and in prayers He implies all the rules of a holy desire.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 History

Having looked at the meaning and purpose of fasting – let us continue our study of fasting by looking at the history of fasting.

Adam had received from God the law of not tasting “of the tree of recognition of good and evil,” with the doom of death to ensue upon tasting... I hold, therefore, that from the very beginning the murderous gullet was to be punished with the torments and penalties of hunger.<sup>4</sup>

As we see – Tertullian starts the history of Fasting with God’s command to abstain from the fruit – for in commanding absence God initiated the first fast. This of course does not fully resemble the later fasts that are practiced – however it does cause the reader to realize that the Kosher laws that were followed by the Jews were also a type of cooperate fast, practiced for centuries by an entire nation.<sup>5</sup>

As was brought out in class – fasting, of a more severe form than the Kosher laws, was something that was always practiced by the saints of the Old Testament. In one lecture, Dr. Jim Smith said that if you were to list those people who fasted, you would see a “who’s who” of the Biblical saints. Clearly fasting was something with a long Jewish history before it was ever adopted by the Church.

Not only was fasting practiced by the Jews, but it also had a history outside the *Judaean-Christian* tradition. Tertullian states in chapter XVI of “On Fasting” that “the heathen recognize every form of ταπεινοφρόνησις.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, among the heathen is every act of “humility” that can be practiced. Even the heathen have methods of practicing self denial – even the heathen have ways of mortifying the flesh. There are not any spiritual disciplines that are unique to Christianity.

## 3 Theology of fasting

In fact, we must even consider the words written by John Chrysostom concerning Fasting in a Homily concerning the *Acts of the Apostles*

I say not fast, but abstain from luxury. Let us seek meats to nourish, not things to ruin us; seek meats for food, not occasions of diseases, or diseases both

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<sup>3</sup>Aurelius Augustin. “On man’s perfection in righteousness”. In: *Nicene and post-Nicene fathers*. First Series. Vol. 5: *St. Agustin’s anti-Pelagian works*. Ed. by Philip Schaff. Trans. by Peter Holmes, Robert Ernest Wallis, and Benjamin B. Warfield. American Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1887, Reprint 1999. Pp. 155–176. URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.xiii.iii.html>, Chap. VIII.

<sup>4</sup>Tertullian. “On Fasting”. In: *ante-Nicene fathers*. Vol. 4: *fathers of the fourth century*. Ed. by A. Cleveland Coxe. Trans. by S. Thelwall. American Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1885, Reprint 1999. Pp. 102–115. URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.iii.ix.i.html>, Chap. III.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., Chap. IV.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., Chap. XVI.

of soul and body: seek food which hath comfort, not luxury which is full of discomfort.<sup>7</sup>

This fact brings us to realize that the spiritual disciplines are not of any help of themselves. The opening quote stated, “food makes one neither more nor less righteous.” If fasting, or any discipline is to be of any aid what so ever – it must be correctly carried out. To skip a few meals just for the sake of skipping meals is not something that brings any help. We must consider the theology behind fasting and the various methods and reasons of fasts that are either approved or prescribed by the church.

### 3.1 Spiritual dangers of fasting

The theology of Fasting has already been touched on – however it would be good to state it in rather strong language. Fasting is participation in the Gospel. It involves the death of the flesh (by self denial) so that the participant can participate in the resurrection of Christ. The only context in which a Christian can benefit spiritually from his fast is in this sacramental sense. If someone fast outside of this sacramental since, he forgets that he is participating in the gospel, and falls into legalism... fasting as the Pharisee or the Hypocrite.

Those that fast outside of the idea of the self denial instead fast for the gratification of the flesh. We must realize that the if we fast in order to be seen by men, we are only working to gratify the flesh... and if we fast for the vanity of the flesh then our fasting is ineffective.<sup>8</sup>

Fasting is undoubtedly important: it fights against the belly and the palate; but sometimes it fights for them.<sup>9</sup>

The acceptable fast must be more the abstaining of food and the humiliation of the body, for if we fast while proud not only is it without profit; the fast is in fact injurious.<sup>10</sup> The fast must be a fast of the type of humility of placing another before yourself:

And not even if you bend your neck like a ring, or clothe yourself in sack-cloth and ashes, shall you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord. This is not the fast which I have chosen, saith the Lord; but loose every unrighteous

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<sup>7</sup>John Chrysostom. “A commentary on the Acts of the Apostles”. In: *Nicene and post-Nicene fathers*. First Series. Vol. 11: *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the epistle to the Romans*. Ed. by Philip Schaff. Trans. by J. Walker et al. American Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1889, reprint 1999. Pp. 1–328. URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf111.vi.html>, 176 Homily XXVII.

<sup>8</sup>Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria. “Letters of Athanasius”. In: *Nicene and post-Nicene fathers*. Second Series. Vol. 4: *Select writings and letters of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria*. Ed. by Archibald Robertson, Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace. American Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999. Pp. 495–581. URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.xxv.iii.iii.i.html>, Letter 1 ¶4.

<sup>9</sup>Aurelius Augustin. “Expositions on the book of the Psalms”. In: *Nicene and post-Nicene fathers*. First Series. Vol. 8. Ed. by A. Cleveland Coxe and Philip Schaff. American Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1888, Reprint 1999. URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf108.I\1.html>, Psalm 87 §8.

<sup>10</sup>John Chrysostom. “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, on the second epistle of St. Paul the apostle to the Corinthians”. In: *Nicene and post-Nicene fathers*. First Series. Vol. 12: *Chysostom: Homilies on the epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*. Ed. by Talbot W. Chambers and Philip Schaff. Trans. by J. Ashworth. American Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1889, reprint 1999. Pp. 271–420. URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf112.v.i.html>, Homily IV §6.

bond, dissolve the terms of wrongous covenants, let the oppressed go free, and avoid every iniquitous contract. Deal thy bread to the hungry, and lead the homeless poor under thy dwelling; if thou seest the naked, clothe him; and do not hide theyself from thine own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy garments shall rise up quickly: and thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of God shall envelope thee.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2 Advice for a beneficial fast

Fasting must be combined with a lifestyle of self-denial. The Christian can not take part in the sacrament of the fast if he is “denying” his flesh in order to fuel his own pride. A fast which glorifies the strength of the flesh is not a fast that allows the participation with Christ. It is a fast which beats down the ones with a right spirit before God. A true fast is one in which “thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of God shall envelope thee.” The self-denial required is one of generosity for those that fast are to “bestow upon the needy... the surplusage of your fast.”<sup>12</sup>

Not only must one be generous as he fasts, but he must also be joyful instead of putting on a somber face. He must wash himself of unrighteousness, as told in the Sermon on the Mount so that he can gain the benefit of a true fast. Augustine writes on this as follows:

“When Ye fast, anoint your head, and wash your faces, that ye appear not unto men to fast” ... We must understand this precept with respect to the anointing the head and washing the face as referring to the inner man. Hence, to anoint the head refers to joy; to wash the face, on the other hand, refers to purity: and therefore that man anoints his head who rejoices inwardly in his mind and reason... Also he will wash his face, i.e. cleanse his heart, with which he shall see God, no veil being interposed... From the squalor, therefore, by which the eye of God is offended, our face is to be washed. For we, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image.<sup>13</sup>

There are several periods when the church (as a whole) is called to fast, and other days when fasting is prohibited by the Church. It would be good to examine these days of fasting and feasting, which are conveniently listed in the *Prayer Book*.

<sup>11</sup>Justin Martyr. “Dialogue of Justin, philosopher and martyr, with Trypho, a Jew”. In: *Ante-Nicene fathers*. Vol. 1. Ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. American Edition. Hendrickson, 1885, Reprint 1999, Chapter 15.

<sup>12</sup>“Constitutions of the holy Apostles”. In: *Ante-Nicene fathers*. Vol. 7: *Fathers of the third and fourth centuries*. Ed. by James Donaldson, Alexander Roberts, and A. Cleveland Coxe. American Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999 (henceforth cited as *Apostolic Constitutions*), Book 5 §20.

<sup>13</sup>Aurelius Augustin. “De Sermone Domini in secundum Mattheaum”. In: *Nicene and ante-Nicene fathers*. First Series. Vol. 6: *Agustin: Sermon on the mount, harmony of the Gospels, Homilies of the Gospels*. Ed. by Philip Schaff. Trans. by William Finday. With annots. by D. S.. Schaff. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999. Pp. 1–63, Book II ¶42.

## **4 The communal cycle of fasting and feasting**

### **4.1 Fasts prescribed by the church**

#### **4.1.1 Wednesday and Friday**

Every Wednesday and Friday is to be observed with fasting unless some important Feast takes precedence over the fast

The Fast on Wednesday is in memory of the betrayal of the Lord, and the Fast on Friday is in remembrance of His Passion and Death upon the Cross

#### **4.1.2 Special Fast Days**

**August 29 – the beheading of St. John the Baptist**

**September 14. The Elevation of the Holy Cross**

**January 5. The eve of the Epiphany**

**Lent, the Great fast** Lent begins forty days before Palm Sunday, on the Monday after Cheese-Fare Sunday, and lasts until the evening preceding Palm Sunday

Holy Week is a special Fast in honor of our Lord's Passion, and lasts from the evening of Palm Sunday through Holy Saturday.

**The Fast of the Holy Apostles** The Fast of the Holy Apostles begins on the Monday after All Saints' Sunday (the Sunday next after Pentecost) and last until June 29, the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul

This fast varies in length according to the date of Easter.

**The Fast of the Theotokos** The Fast which proceeds the Feast of the Falling-asleep of the All-Holy Theotokos begins on August 1 and lasts until the day of the Feast, August 15.

**The Fast before Christmas** The fast before Christmas begins November 15 and lasts until the day of the Feast of the Nativity, December 25.

### **4.2 Periods when fasting is forbidden**

**From December 25 to January 5**

**The week following the Sunday of the Pharisee and Publican**

**The week following Meat-fare Sunday** (No meat is allowed either)

**The week following Easter**

## The week following Pentecost

All Saturdays except Holy Saturday.<sup>14</sup>

### 4.3 Advice for the keeping ecclesiastical Fasts

#### 4.3.1 Weekly Fasts

The First fast mentioned by the *Prayer Book* is the weekly fasts of Wednesday and Friday. These days are offset from the days of the “fast of the Pharisee,” whom Jesus told us not to emulate so that the regular fast of the church would not be with the Hypocrites.<sup>15</sup> “Constitutions of the holy Apostles” attribute the origin of these weekly one day long fasts to the command of Christ, given to the apostles after the Resurrection.

He commanded us to fast on the fourth and sixth days of the week; the former on account of His being betrayed, and the latter on account of His passion.<sup>16</sup> ... and you must fast on the day of the Preparation, because on that day the Lord suffered the death of the cross under Pontius Pilate.<sup>17</sup>

Instructions for the weekly fast are as follows:

First of all, be on your guard against every evil word, and every evil desire, and purify your heart from the vanities of this world. If you guard against these things, your fasting will be perfect. And you will do also as follows. Having fulfilled what is written, in the day on which you fast you will taste nothing but bread and water; and having reckoned up the price of the dishes of that day which you intended to have eaten, you will give it to a widow, or an orphan, or to some person in want, and thus you will exhibit humility of mind, so that he who has received benefit from your humility may fill his own soul, and pray for you to the Lord. If you observe fasting, as I have commanded you, your sacrifice will be acceptable to God.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Lent

The “Constitutions of the holy Apostles” give a rather garbled description the keeping of Lent, which could be interpreted in the same manner as the *Prayer Book*. What appears to be described is a series of five-day fasts, started on Monday and broken on Saturday. This series of five-day fasts is to be observed “before the fast of the Passover.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *A pocket prayer book for Orthodox Christians*. Englewood, NJ: Antiochian Orthodox Christian archdiocese, 1997, Schedule taken from pp 33-34.

<sup>15</sup> “The teaching of the twelve apostles”. In: *ante-Nicene fathers*. Vol. 7: *fathers of the third and fourth centuries*. Ed. by A. Cleveland Coxe, Alexander Roberts, and James Donaldson. Hendrickson, MA: Hendrickson, 1999. Pp. 371–383, Chap. VIII.

<sup>16</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, Book V ¶XV.

<sup>17</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, Book VII ¶XXIII.

<sup>18</sup> “The Pastor of Hermas”. In: *ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. 2: *Fathers of the second century*. Ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Coxe. A. Cleveland. Trans. by F. Crombie. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999. Pp. 1–58, Book III Simultude V Chapter III.

<sup>19</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, Book V ¶XIII.

The purpose of observing Lent is to spend a time observing the gravity of the passion of Christ. It is a period of preparation so that the observer can truly understand the joy of Easter; or as Augustine writes:

The misery of the life before the Resurrection of the Lord's body is signified; so that day which after the Resurrection shall be given to the full body of the Lord, that is, to the holy Church, when all the troubles and sorrows of this life has been shut out, shall succeed with perpetual bliss.<sup>20</sup>

**Holy Week** The nature of the fast on Holy Week is to be a week limited to bread, herbs, and water; or a fast from wine and meat. This fast runs from Monday to the Saturday preceding Easter, "for they are days of lamentation and not of feasting."

**Maundy Thursday** This fast is practiced differently in different locations, and the Judgment of Augustine on which way Maundy Thursday is to be observed is as follows:

You ask, "What ought to be done on the Thursday of the last week of Lent? Ought we to offer the sacrifice in the morning, and again after supper, on account of the words in the Gospel, 'Likewise also... after supper'? Or ought we to fast and offer the sacrifice only after supper? Or ought we to fast until the offering has been made, and then take supper as we are accustomed to do?" I answer, therefore, that if the authority of Scripture has decided which of these methods is right, there is no room for doubting that we should do according to that which is written; and our discussion must be occupied with a question, not of duty, but of interpretation as to the meaning of divine institution. In like manner, if the universal church follows any one of these methods, there is no room for doubt as to our duty; for it would be the height of arrogant madness to discuss whether or not we should comply with it. But the question which you propose is not decided either by Scripture or by universal practice... Let every man therefore, conform himself to the usage prevailing in the Church to which he may come. For not one of these methods is contrary to the Christian faith or the interests of morality, as favoured by the adoption of one custom more than the other.<sup>21</sup>

**Good Friday and Holy Saturday** For the days of Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the participant, if he is able, is to keep a two day fast.

If any one is not able to join them both together, at least let him observe the Sabbath-day; for the Lord says somewhere, speaking of Himself: "When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, in those days shall they fast."<sup>22</sup>

The Saturday fast is to be accompanied by a watch – those who celebrate Easter are to:

<sup>20</sup> Augustin, "Expositions on the book of the Psalms", CXI ¶1.

<sup>21</sup> Aurelius Augustin. "Letters of St. Agustin". In: *Nicene and post-Nicene fathers*. first series. Vol. 1: *The confessions and letters of Agustin*. Ed. by Philip Schaff. Trans. by J. G. Cunningham. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999. Pp. 209–593, Letter LIV ¶6.

<sup>22</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, Book V ¶XVIII.

Assemble together in the church, watch and pray, and entreat God' reading, when you sit up all night, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, until the cock-crowing, and baptizing your catechumens, and reading the Gospel with fear and trembling, and speaking to the people such things as tend to their salvation.<sup>23</sup>

#### **4.3.3 Other Fasts**

I was unable to find any writing that would aid in the explanation of the fasts of the calendar – with the exception of the exhortation for Christians to follow these fasts that are prescribed by the Church. Canon Law did not provide the exact details I needed in describing the fast – unlike the great Lent, which was written about by everyone.

#### **4.4 Keeping feasts**

There are also several days when fasting is prohibited. The most often occurring days are Saturday and Sunday, “because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection.”<sup>24</sup> The reasons for the exemptions are given as follows:

Every Sabbath-day excepting one, and every Lord's day, hold your solemn assemblies, and rejoice: for he will be guilty of sin who fasts on the Lord's day, being the day of the resurrection, or during the time of Pentecost, or, in general, who is sad on a festival day to the Lord. For on them we ought to rejoice rather than mourn.<sup>25</sup>

### **5 Private fasts**

#### **5.1 The private fast compared to the cooperate**

Up to now, we have focused on the cooperate fasting of the Church. Now the Cooperate fasting of the Church is something which is practiced because of its sacramental value. The church are those people who participate with Christ in his Crucifixion and His resurrection. Cooperate fasting is a tangible method of sharing in this participation, so that's its cooperate benefits are sacramental in nature. In addition the practice of cooperate fasting, helps increase the stock of the food pantry... because as mentioned before times of fasting are also times for the donation of foodstuff for the poor.

It would be good to move from the cooperate practice of fasting to the private fasting of the individual. In reading of the fasts of the church – we realize that there are times when fasting is required, and times when is prohibited. Looking at those days, we realize that the majority of the calendar the person is free to choose whether or not to fast.

The personal practice of fasting is that which all of modern (Protestant) research has focused on, however again it maybe useful to look at the advises of the Fathers. In this we will look at personal fasting such as fasting for others, and fasting for Penance.

<sup>23</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, Book V ¶XVIX.

<sup>24</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, Book VII ¶XXXIII.

<sup>25</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, Book V ¶XX.

## 5.2 Baptism

The first of the personal fasts that is prescribed is that of the fast before Baptism.

They who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee, and vigils all the night through and with the confession of all by-gone sins... for we do at the same time both make satisfaction for our former sins, by mortification of the flesh and spirit, and lay beforehand the foundation of defenses against the temptations which will closely follow. "Watch and pray," saith (the Lord), "least ye fall into temptation."<sup>26</sup>

This is apparently a meaningful fast – for by baptism, the catechumen is received into the church. This is recommending preparation for this beginning of church life by mortification of the flesh, and training against bodily temptations. The catechumen become experienced in self-denial and a participant in the cross life before he ever is allowed to take the bread and the cup.

## 5.3 Intercessory fasting

Another personal fast that I would wish to look into is the practice of fasting for someone else. In a fast for a fellow Christian who is persecuted by the heathen, one is not only to devote himself to prayer, but also give the physical substance needed.

If any Christian, on account of the name of Christ, and love and faith towards God, be condemned by the ungodly to the games, to the beasts, or to the mines, do not... overlook him; but send to him from your labour and your very sweat for his substance, and for a reward to the soldiers, that he may be eased and taken care of; that, as far as lies in your power, your blessed brother may not be afflicted: for he that is condemned for the name of the Lord God is a holy martyr... If any has not, let him fast a day, and set apart that and order it for the saints... If any one has superfluities, let him minister more to them according to the proportion of his ability. But if he can possibly sell all his livelihood, and redeem them out of prison, he will be blessed, and a friend of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Augustine writes that we are supposed to fast not only for the brothers in Christ, but he also gives instructions for fasting for those who are outside of the Christian Communities; yea even the enemies of Christianity, He writes:

For the Lord our God who sitteth in us hath said, He hath Himself commanded us to pray for our enemies, to pray for them that persecute us: And as the Church doth this, the persecutors are almost extinct... Different are the fasts which we celebrate through the days of the approaching Passover, through

<sup>26</sup>Tertullian. "On Baptism". In: *ante-Nicene fathers*. Vol. 3: *Latin Chistianity: It's founder, Tertulian*. Ed. by A. Cleveland Coxe, Alexander Roberts, and James Donaldson. Trans. by S. Thelwall. American Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999. Pp. 669–679, Chap. XX.

<sup>27</sup>Apostolic Constitutions, Book V ¶I.

different seasons which are fixed for us in Christ: but through their holidays we fast for this reason, that when they are rejoicing, we may groan for them... Let us pray... that to them also God may grant understanding, and that with us they may hear those words, in which we are at this moment rejoicing.<sup>28</sup>

#### 5.4 Penitent fasting

Fasting is at times suggested as a practice of penance, assigned to someone as a private fast by the church.<sup>29</sup> Now this fast is something that is rather easy to explain – for the reason that fasting would be prescribed as a penance is that there is a sin concerning the failure to discipline the flesh. As we all know, fasting is a discipline of the flesh – training it so that Tertullian said of Fasting:

Lust without voracity would certainly be considered a monstrous phenomenon; since these two are so united and concrete, that, had there been any possibility of disjoining them, the pudenda would not have been affixed to the belly itself rather than elsewhere. Look at the body: the region (of these members) is one and the same. In short, the order of the vices is proportionate to the arrangement of the members. First the belly; and then immediately the materials of all other species of lasciviousness are laid subordinately to daintiness: Through love of eating, love of impurity finds passage... Imposing, as it does, reigns upon the appetite, through taking, sometimes no meals, or late meals, or dry meals...<sup>30</sup>

Tertullian is in this chapter telling us that we personally fast in order to break the power of the flesh. Through the conquering of the appetite, and no longer being ruled by the stomach, we become free from the rule of lust, or as Augustine says:

Abstinence is extended even unto the slenderest food of bread and water, and fasting not only for the day, but also continued through several days together; that chastity is carried.<sup>31</sup>

If we consider the nature of fasting for Penance, we realize that it is something that by its very nature goes against pride – for we are denying the flesh because we failed and had indulged the flesh instead of joining with discipline. We are educating and training the body to live outside of the tyranny of its own lusts. “For by these means we shall have strength to overcome our advisories.”<sup>32</sup>

It would be good to finish the thoughts on fasting with the basic purpose of practicing self denial – we are not here, on this earth, for the sake of our own pleasure. St. Ambrose says,

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<sup>28</sup> Augustin, “Expositions on the book of the Psalms”, XCIX ¶5.

<sup>29</sup> Apostolic Constitutions, Book II ¶XVI.

<sup>30</sup> Tertullian, “On Fasting”, Chapter I.

<sup>31</sup> Aurelius Augustin. “De utilitate credendi”. In: *Nicene and ante-Nicene fathers. First Series. Vol. 3: Agustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*. Ed. by Philip Schaff. Trans. by C. L. Cornish. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999. Pp. 347–366, ¶35.

<sup>32</sup> Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, op. cit., Letter IV ¶2.

“While we are aiming at pleasure by means of banquets and songs, we have lost that which is infused into us by the reception of the Word, whereby alone we can be saved.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ambrose. “Selections from the letters of St. Ambrose”. In: *Nicene and post-Nicene fathers*. Second series. Vol. 10: *Ambrose: Select books and letters*. Ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Trans. by H. De Romestin, E. De Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth. Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 1999. Pp. 411–473, Letter LXIII ¶20.

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