

LENT, 1771: AN EXHORTATION To be read to the faithful on SHROVE-SUNDAY, and on the first Sunday in Lent, 1771

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# EXHORTATION

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To be read to the faithful on *SHROVE-SUNDAY*, and  
on the first Sunday in Lent, 1771.

[This EXHORTATION was issued by Rt. Rev. Richard Challoner, Vicar-Apostolic for the London District. As the British-American Provinces were under his spiritual jurisdiction and directed by him, this EXHORTATION and the annexed REGULATIONS FOR LENT were addressed to the Catholics of the Colonies. In 1771 these could only have been publicly read in Catholic chapels in the Province of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia, Lancaster, Reading and Goshenhoppen. In Maryland they could only have been read to the Catholics assembled to hear Mass in private houses.]

*From rare copy in American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia.*

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*We exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith: "In an accepted time have I heard thee; and in the day of salvation have I helped thee. Behold now is the accepted time; Behold now is the day of salvation. 2 Cor. 2. 1, vi.*

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THESE words of the apostle are addressed by the Church to all the children in the office of the holy time of Lent, which we are now entering upon; by which she desires to put them all in mind, that if they would secure to their souls the mercy and grace of God effectually to their eternal salvation; now is their time; a most favorable and acceptable time; in which the *fountains of our Saviour* are laid open for the washing away all their sins, and plentifully refreshing their souls with

the waters of grace and life, which flow most abundantly at this holy time from the sacred wounds of our divine Redeemer, whose passion and death we now celebrate. These same words, conforming ourselves with the intentions of this our holy mother, we address you, my dearly beloved, on this day, to you as our peculiar charge, entreating you in the name of Christ, and as his ministers, and *ambassadors* from him to you (2 Cor. v. 29), to embrace this acceptable time, these days of mercy and grace with your whole heart, *for Christ we beseech you to be reconciled to God*, to turn now from all your evil ways of sin and death, and to be effectually converted to the living God as he himself commands (Joel ii.); *with fasting, weeping and mourning*, and that you would beware, above all things, of *receiving in vain*, to your greater condemnation, this *grace*, this very great grace, which he offers you at this time for the securing your eternal salvation: yes, dear Christians, this grace to which you are now invited, both by Christ and his Church, is a very great grace indeed; may my God make you truly sensible to the greatness of it, and of the infinite importance of your corresponding with it. This holy time of Lent is indeed *an acceptable time*; these forty days are indeed *days of salvation*. This great, this primitive, this apostolical fast of Lent, which by tradition from the apostles, has been received from the beginning by all Christian nations, together with their Christianity itself, has always been considered by the holy fathers, and by all the saints, as an observance of infinite consequence to all Christian souls: not only as being a *course of penance*, a *penitential fast*, which being joined with the works of mercy and liberal alms (according to each one's circumstances) and with fervent prayer night and day, may secure to our souls the remission of all our past sins; but also as being a tithe of the year, set aside for God, to be dedicated and consecrated in a particular manner to him, by spiritual exercises, in the way of a *spiritual retreat*, in order to a thorough examination of the whole state of our *interior*, for the rectifying all that is there amiss, and setting for ourselves a rule of life for the future, which being duly observed may effectually bring us to live forever, with the ever living God. The whole to be performed with an eye to the death and passion of Jesus Christ, the source of all our good, which we celebrate at this time; and to the worthily preparing ourselves for the sacred mysteries, to which we are commanded to approach at Easter.

Hence the Catholick Christian, who desires effectually to secure to himself, through Jesus Christ, all that mercy and grace, which is here designed:

and prepared for us all, in this sacred institution of this solemn fast of Lent, must not only be strictly diligent in observing the whole discipline prescribed by the Church, with relation to the exterior fast, but must moreover be extremely careful to animate his fast with that truly *penitential spirit*; that spirit of compunction and devotion, which is the very soul of a Christian fast, and without which the exterior performance is but like a dead carcass without a soul. The ancient discipline of the Universal Church, was with regard to the holy time of Lent, much more rigorous than now it is; both in the point of abstinence (forbidding wine no less than flesh) and more especially in their neither eating nor drinking anything in Lent before the evening: and this part of primitive discipline was kept up (as we learn from S. Bernard, writing in the twelfth century), and strictly observed by all degrees of Christians, during the space of eleven years after Christ. But, Oh! how much has the modern Church, yielding to the weakness of her children in these degenerate ages, departed from this rigor of her ancient discipline; contenting herself now, with regard to the exterior observance of the fast, with only insisting upon three things, viz.: First, the abstaining from flesh meat, during the forty days of Lent; secondly, the eating but one meal in the day; and, thirdly, the not taking that meal till noon. But if she has thus qualified the rigor of her exterior discipline, she has never ceased to inculcate to all her children the strict necessity and indispensable obligation, of their recommending the exterior observance to the divine acceptance by the interior penitential spirit. This is evident from her perpetually preaching up to them in her office appointed for this holy time, the sacrifice of a contrite and humble spirit; and that they *rend their hearts, and not their garments*; and turn away from all their sins with horror, detestation and sorrow for them; and should daily bewail them at the feet of the crucified Saviour; and that they should labor by a general mortification of all their sensual pleasures, and disorderly appetites, to break in sunder the chains of their unhappy affections to sin; and should return to God with all their heart, and dedicate themselves eternally to him by love and obedience.

Moreover she daily inculcates to them with the prophet (Isaiah lviii. 4) that if they would offer up to the Lord at this holy time *the fast which he has chosen*, and which will be acceptable to him, they must recommend it by a diligence in exercising the works of mercy, and giving alms according to their ability; and for this end retrenching all superfluous expenses; and

much more all such as only serve to gratify pride, vanity and sensuality, or are flung away upon play, routs, theatrical shows, or other pomps of Satan, and sensual entertainments of such as walk in the broad road of the Babylon of the world; which no ways become a serious Christian at any time (who is taught by the gospel that there is no other way for him to heaven but the *narrow way* of self-denial and mortification, St. Matthew vii.) but at this sacred time of Lent, would be entirely out of character, not to say profane and irreligious. Excuse me, dear children, if there be any amongst you that are guilty of this kind of profanation of this holy penitential time, if I here warn you of the dreadful danger to which you expose your dear souls by so gross an abuse of these *days of salvation*, which by the will of God, and the ordinance of the Church, ought to be dedicated and consecrated to his divine majesty, in order to secure to your souls the mercy and grace of God here, and the kingdom of heaven hereafter; but which by this profanation are given away from God, and sacrificed to his and your mortal enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil. And to what else but this un-Christian profaning these days, dedicated to retirement, devotion and penance (which of late years has gained so much ground amongst us) can we attribute the visible decay of Christian piety and religion, amongst too many of our people, which is so justly lamented by all that truly fear and love God. As then by our station we are appointed watchmen over this small remnant of the house of Israel, which is allotted to our care; and as we evidently see the sword of divine justice hanging over the heads of as many as habitually abuse, in this gross manner, these holy times of mercy and grace, and continually threatening to cut them off in their sins; we should be greatly wanting to the duty we owe to the souls committed to our charge, as well as to the care we ought to have in securing our own, if we neglected to give this seasonable warning to all whom it may concern: which if it should be no more regarded than the warnings we have given before; and the sword of God coming should cut off many in their sins, we shall have the comfort at least of delivering our own souls; and that the blood of them, who in consequence of their disregarding our warning shall perish in their sins, shall not be required at our hands. (Ezekiel iii, and xxxiii.)

As to the rest, let us once more beg of you all for Christ's sake, so to enter upon these forty days, and so to go through with them, that you may *not receive this great grace of God in vain*, which is here designed for you. Perhaps it may be the last grace of the kind, which the Lord may allow

you ; and that your neglect of corresponding with it may so provoke the divine justice as to put a stop to your reprieve, and to let the sentence of death, which stands out against all wilful sinners, be suddenly executed upon you. *Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed.* (Jonas iii.) Embrace then with your whole heart and soul this favorable time of mercy and grace, and be *reconciled to God.* O it is a favorable time indeed for all poor sinners, in which all the people of God upon earth (amongst whom there are always many thousands of saint-like souls) all join in prayer and fasting for obtaining mercy for themselves and for all poor sinners : and our great high priest, Jesus Christ the son of God, whose death and passion we celebrate at this holy time, puts himself at our head, to sue himself in person for the forgiveness of our sins, through his own most precious blood *Let us go then now with all the people of God, and with the Lamb of God himself, to the throne of mercy and grace, at this acceptable time, with confidence of obtaining mercy, and of finding grace in seasonable aid.* Heb. iv. 16.)

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## —○— REGULATIONS —○—

FOR THE

### FAST OF LENT, 1771.

*For the L—— District.*

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In consideration of the hardness of the times, and of the present scarcity of almost all manner of provisions, the following allowances are made to the faithful in this district, for this Lent 1771 yet so as not to be made a precedent for other years.

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**F**LESH meat is allowed on all Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, for five weeks, beginning with the first Sunday of Lent, and ending with the Thursday before Palm-Sunday. But on the Tuesdays and the Thursdays this allowance is only for once in the day.