169 Fasting (*Jejunium*)

Note here first that God instituted fasting in paradise, but afterwards sanctified it when Christ fasted forty days and forty nights, Matt. 4[:2].

However, there is a triple fasting: the first is of the body from material food; the second is of affliction from temporal joy; the third is of the heart from mortal sin. But the first two are of little value without the third. Wherefore Isais 58[:3-6]: “Why have we fasted, and thou hast not regarded,” and it follows, “Behold you fast for debates and strife,” and it follows, “Is this such a fast as I have chosen” … “loose the bands of wickedness,” etc. Wherefore Jerome in the *Gloss*,[[1]](#endnote-1) he fasts for God who makes himself thin for his love and what he withdraws from himself he bestows upon the poor.

¶ Our ancient fathers fasted in three cases: besieged by enemies, vexed by tribulations, and debilitated by infirmities. Thus, spiritually they had to be besieged by demons. Wherefore Judith in the days of the siege of Bethulia fasted, Judith 8[:6].

Concerning the second, it is evident in Esther 4[:16] when Aman procured the edict against the Jewish people she fasted and was liberated. Thus, also we when we are troubled should return to fasting, Psal. [68:11]: “And I covered my soul in fasting,” that which is covered is hidden lest it be seen.

¶ Concerning the third, 2 Kings 12[:16] when his boy was sick, “David kept a fast.” Thus, those languishing in sins ought to fast to the Lord that they may be cleansed.

Again, note that that fast which is necessary for us to make out the institution of the church and if we do not, we sin mortally, it is not properly for satisfaction. Of such a kind is to fast in lent, in the vigils of the saints, in the four seasons, in each of the litanies, but that fasting which is freely assumed or imposed by the priest is satisfaction for fault.

¶ Again immoderate and indiscreet fasting is reproved, *De consecratione*, Dist. 5, [c. *Non mediocriter*].[[2]](#endnote-2) Similarly, he who prefers mediocre fasting such as he who prefers fasting for esteem or a sense of unity for vigils. Therefore, let your fasting be daily and measured, *De consecracione*, Dist. 5, c. *Sint tibi.[[3]](#endnote-3)* For many on account of too much abstinence incur failure of members and madness of the heart. Therefore, Paul exhorts [2] Timothy [4:7-8] who had afflicted himself greatly and with fasts to exercise himself more “unto godliness.” Wherefore Jerome, *Super Zacharias*,[[4]](#endnote-4) not in eating, nor in abstaining is there justice, but in consuming temperately when there is abundance. Wherefore Philip. [4:12]: “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound,” Dist. 41, c. *Quod dicit.[[5]](#endnote-5)*

¶ Also note here as to diverse intentions of fasting that sometimes they are not meritorious as is evident in this verse:

¶ The sick, the needy, the avaricious, the glutton, the ape, and the virtuous abstain.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The sick abstains either because he cannot eat or on account of bodily medicine. The needy abstains because he does not have anything to eat. The avaricious lest he spend money. The glutton so that afterwards he may consume more avidly. The ape, that is, the hypocrite so that through this he may be praised. The virtuous, that is the excellent, so that through this he may be rewarded by the Lord and because our first parents by eating of the forbidden tree led us into sin.

Therefore, we ought through fasting return since it is the great part of penitence. Wherefore says Ambrose in the *Hexameron*,[[7]](#endnote-7) that the saliva of a fasting man kills a serpent. So, fasting kills the spiritual serpent, that is, sin. Wherefore it is read in Matt. 17[:20] that demonic could not be cured “but by prayer and fasting.” A strong army in a strong castle is not cast out except by taking away the food or by the smoke of fire. The first happens by fasting. The second by prayer just as the devil is not cast out from the strong castle of the soul except by fasting and prayer. Wherefore Tob. 3[:8-10] Sara was freed through fasting and prayer by the Lord from the devil Asmodeus who had killed his seven men.

Again, Jerome, *Against Jovinian*, book 2,[[8]](#endnote-8) the city of Nineveh held back the imminent wrath of the Lord by the work of fasting. When Ahab was fasting and in sack cloth, he turned away the sentence upon his house and against himself.

See more concerning fasting below [in chapter 171 Fasting (*Jeiunium*)].*ecHeHe*

1. *Glossa Ordinaria*, Matthew 6.17 (PL 114:104): Deo jejunat qui pro amore ejus se macerat et quod sibi subtrahit alteri largitur. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Decretum, De Cons., Dist. 5, c. 24: Non mediocriter errat qui magno bono prefert mediocre bonum. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Decretum, De Cons., Dist. 5, c. 19: Sint tibi cottidiana ieiunia, refectio sacietatem fugiens. Nichil enim prodest tibi biduo uel triduo transmisso uacuum portare uentrem, si pariter obstruatur. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Jerome, cf. Augustine, *Quaestionum Evangeliorum*  2.11 (PL 35:1337): Quod autem subjungit, Et justificata est sapientia ab omnibus filiis suis, ostendit filios sapientiae intelligere, nec in abstinendo, nec in manducando esse justitiam, sed in aequanimitate tolerandi inopiam, et temperantia per abundantiam non se corrumpendi, atque opportune sumendi vel non sumendi ea quorum non usus, sed concupiscentia reprehendenda est. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Decretum, Dist. 41, c. 4: Quod dicit Dominus in euangelio.... Magis ergo interest, non quid uel quantum alimentorum pro congruentia hominum atque personæ suæ, et pro suæ ualetudinis necessitate quis accipiat, sed quanta facilitate et serenitate animi careat, cum his uel oportet, uel necesse est carere; ut illud in animo Christiani conpleatur, quod Apostolus dicit: “Scio et minus habere, scio et habundare; ubique et in omnibus inbutus sum: et saciari, et esurire, et habundare, et penuriam pati, omnia possum in eo, qui me confortat”. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Stanislai Hosii, *Opera Omnia* (Venetiis: Apud Dominicum Nicolinum, 1573), cap. 91, p. 173: Abstinet aeger, egens, cupidus, gula, simia, virtus. <https://books.google.com/books?id=gV9nAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA173&lpg=PA173&dq=Abstinent+eger+egens,+cupidus,+gula&source=bl&ots=WWP_1v5UNX&sig=qlZKYCwR76tLjNREkYyTNtFPa5Y&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjFnoTl_-fTAhUl_4MKHYGND3MQ6AEIKTAC#v=onepage&q=Abstinent%20eger%20egens%2C%20cupidus%2C%20gula&f=false> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.4.28 (PL 14:252): Jejuni hominis sputum si serpens gustaverit, moritur. Vides quanta vis jejunii sit; ut et sputo suo homo terrenum serpentem interficiat, et merito spiritalem. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* 2 (PL 23:308): Et e contrario civitas Ninive, imminentem iram Domini jejuniorum miseratione detorsit: quam et Sodoma placasset et Gomorrha, si voluisset agere poenitentiam, et lacrymas [Al. lacrymis] poenitentiae patrocinante conciliare jejunio. Achab rex impiissimus, ut sententiam Dei subterfugeret, et eversio domus ejus differretur in posteros, jejunio impetravit et sacco. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)