

blessed of My Father. What kind of Christian is it who will not fast during this season? Recall how the Ninivites required even of children at the breast that they too should fast, and their flocks and herds likewise, that all might be delivered from the danger that threatened them. What kind of Christian is he who though well and able refuses to fast with Moses, with Elias, and with the Lord? They will say: We cannot both work and fast. They cannot because they will not. Let them work less that they may fast more...

Let those who are able attend daily Mass... Let him who has hate in his heart, or anger, against another, put it wholly from him; if he wishes to be saved... Every Sunday all Christians should offer Mass and communicate... during Lent you should offer and communicate daily... lead a pure and holy life, so that you may be worthy to approach to Holy Communion... finally, whatever it is that you deny yourself through fasting must be given entirely to the poor, not kept back for yourselves.

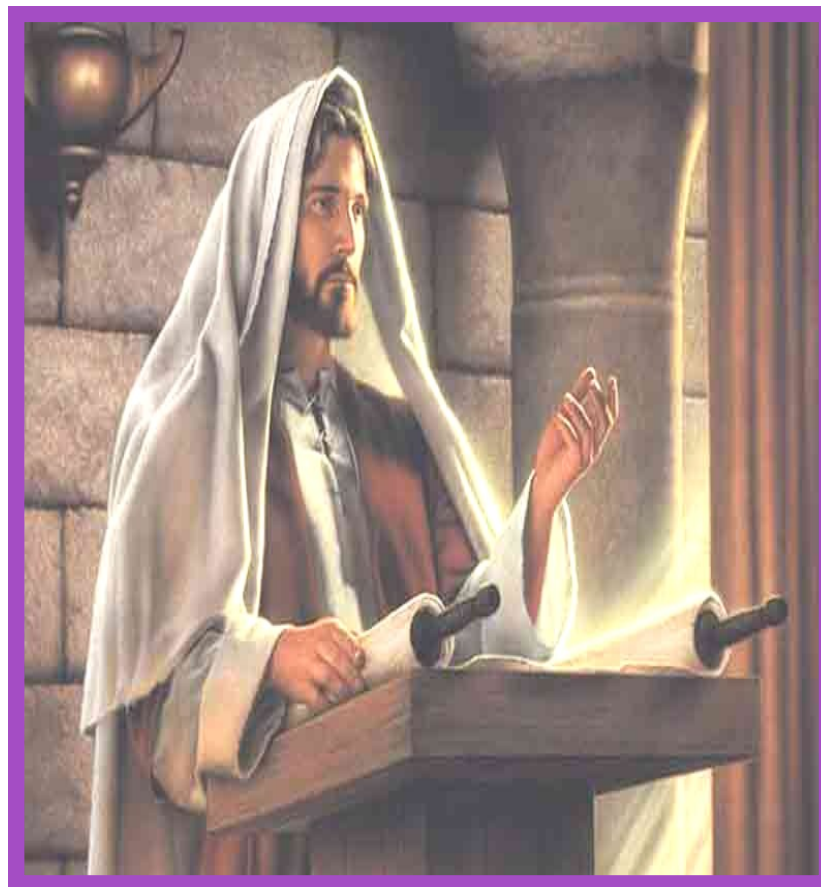


Jesus fasting in the desert

If you keep before you what I have told you, and that you fulfill it in deed, may Almighty God grant that at the end of this life, and at the close of your labors, you may enter into eternal rest. May He grant you this Who created you, and sought at the price of His own blood to redeem you, Who livest and reignest world without end. Amen.



**SERMON ON
THE SEASON OF PENANCE
FROM THE FATHER'S OF THE CHURCH
142 - 1**



JESUS, OUR FIRST PREACHER!

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Based on the Divine Office-Douay-Rheims Version

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Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew 4: 1-11

by: Saint Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor

Behold, now is the appointed time, in which you must confess your sins to God, and to the priest, and by prayer, fasting, tears and almsgiving, wipe them away. Why should a sinner be ashamed to make known his sins, since they are already known and manifest to God, and to His angels, and even to the blessed in heaven? Confession delivers the soul from death. It opens the door to heaven and brings us hope of salvation. Because of this the Scripture says: First tell thy iniquities, that you may be justified (Is. xliii. 26). Here we are shown that the man will not be saved who, during his life, does not confess his sins. Neither will that confession deliver you which is made without true repentance. For true repentance is grief of heart and sorrow of soul because of evils a man has committed. True repentance causes us to grieve over our offenses, and to grieve over them with the firm intention of never committing them again.

Though every day a man lives may rightly be a day of repentance, yet is it in these days more becoming, more appropriate, to confess our sins, to fast, and to give alms to the poor; since in these days you may wash clean the sins of the whole year... repair whatever you may know within your soul is blameworthy. Whosoever among you discerns within himself what is unworthy in a Christian, let him correct it; and where he has given less than his due, as where he has not faithfully paid his tithes. What does it mean to give tithes faithfully, but that no man should offer to God, either of his grain, wine, fruit of his trees, sheep, or from his business, what is defective or stunted. For of all substance the Lord bestows on a man, a tenth part He reserves to Himself. It is not lawful to keep what the Lord has reserved to Himself. To thee He has given nine parts; for Himself He reserved a tenth. If you do not give God His tenth part, God will take your nine parts from you.

If anyone knows in his own heart that he has taken something unjustly from another, let him make amends by restoring what he has

unjustly taken. For he that will not render to God His tenth, which He reserved to Himself, and to another man what he took from him unjustly, such a man no longer fears God, and does not know the meaning of true repentance, or of true confession of his sins.

Such a man cannot give an honest alms. It is good then to render to God what is His, and to your neighbor what belongs to him; so that when you give alms from the fruits of your own honest labor, you may obtain pardon of your sins, according to the word of God: *Redeem thou thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor* (Dan. iv. 24). You should further know: *that as water quencheth a flaming fire, alms resisteth sins* (Ecclus. iii. 23).

This you ought to do, since according to his means should give to the needy; that is, he that has much should give much, and he that has but little ought to give a little; as the holy Tobias taught his son: *Give alms out of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from the poor: for so will it come to pass that the face of the Lord shall not be turned away from thee. According to thy ability be merciful. If thou have much give abundantly: if thou have little, take care to bestow willingly even a little. For thus thou storest up to thyself a good reward for the day of necessity* (Tob. iv. 7-10).

With what earnestness and eagerness, should not the Christian give alms, so that he may hear at the day of judgment the words: *For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison and you came to me. Come, ye blessed of my Father* (Mt. xxv. 34-36). If you will not do these works of mercy which I here recall to your minds, then on that day shall you hear: *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire...*

If you do these works, He will say to you: *Come, ye*