

This is reality. We do not live in the fairy tale world of Madison Avenue and Hollywood. Reality is not what the modern media tells us it is. Why then, the Church asks, are you so occupied with the myths manufactured by worldlings? Why are you so concerned with the health and well-being of your body which will one day die and disintegrate? Why are you so indifferent to the health and well-being of your immortal soul, that soul which will never die and which will be conscious and capable of joy or pain, happiness or misery, for all eternity? Why do you labor after things which perish? Why do you do the least you can to gain heaven and the most you can to gain the things of this fleeting existence on earth? These are the questions the Church directs to us. As a loving mother, the Church directs us to the right thoughts and the right practices. She directs us to the discipline which is necessary to restore and maintain the health of the soul.

Some might ask: "Is it really necessary to choose between the flesh and the spirit? Why can't we have a full measure of both?" The answer is that the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. There are two principles at work in us. One leads to life everlasting and the other to death everlasting. Originally this was not so. Originally there was harmony between the soul and the body. The disharmony that we experience was introduced by sin. The soul of man revolted against God, hence the body revolted against the soul. The body must be brought into subjection, for if the soul does not win this war, it will lose it. There must be victory or defeat. There cannot be a truce or an accommodation.

St. Paul himself said that he had to chastise his body and bring it into subjection, lest having preached to others he himself should be lost for eternity. (I Cor. 9:27) Imagine, the Apostle Paul, he who had been converted by Our Lord Himself, he who was taken up to heaven and to whom was revealed heavenly things not given to men to know. This same Apostle tells us that after all these things, he had to do penances—lest having preached to others he might lose his own soul. If it was necessary for St. Paul to do penance, what of us, sinners that we are? This is the purpose of Lent, to remind us of this obligation.

As we go through Lent and do the penances the Church prescribes and the ones we voluntarily assume,

we must never forget that to bring the body into subjection is really to bring the soul into subjection. The virtues that control the body are in the soul. External mortification, such as fasting, has for its goal internal mortification. The Gospels assigned by the Church for the Masses of Lent remind us constantly that we are to change our hearts. We are to put on and to make our own the qualities of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. "Take up My yoke upon you and learn of Me," Our Lord said, "because I am meek and humble of Heart." (Matt. 11:29) Then we will find rest for our souls. In a heart like the Heart of Jesus, there is no place for inordinate anger, impatience, injustice, or impurity, nor is there any place for hatred, animosity, back-biting, name calling, or unkindness. God wants us to have a contrite and humble heart. He wants us to have a forgiving heart. I encourage you to take to heart the following words this Lent. They are from the Gospel for the Mass on the Friday immediately following Ash Wednesday, and they are Our Lord's words from His Sermon on the Mount: "I say to you: love your enemies, do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you." (Matt. 5:44) If we love those who love us, if we are kind to those who are kind to us, if we do good things to those who do good things to us, if we say hello only to those who greet us, how do we differ from the pagans and sinners who do likewise?

Think about what Our Lord commands. If someone hates you, He says to do good to him. If someone curses you, bless him. If someone goes around telling lies about you to destroy your reputation, pray for him. Are these commands He gave only for the saints? No! They are commands He gives all of us. In fact, He goes so far as to say that if we do not show mercy, we will not receive mercy. If we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven. In this world there are many people who are the sworn enemies of God. They hate Him and His holy will. Yet God loves them and seeks their salvation. Their souls are dark pestilential places. They are filled with rot and filth, yet God seeks their conversion. The Eternal Son of God died for them. This is the spirit of forgiveness, kindness, and charity we must strive to foster this Lent in our hearts and in our homes. Let us make this a good Lent. Let us mortify our bodies that our souls may be mortified. Once mortified, may they become fields in which the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus blossoms.