

all kinds of fasting, but one of the first is from food and drink. This is a timeless and ancient remedy for the sin of the flesh. Take in for a moment, what St. Basil the Great said about it. "Fasting gives birth to prophets and strengthens the powerful; fasting makes lawgivers wise. Fasting is a good safeguard for the soul, a steadfast companion for the body, a weapon for the valiant, and a gymnasium for athletes. Fasting repels temptations, anoints unto piety; it is the comrade of watchfulness and the artificer of chastity. In war it fights bravely, in peace it teaches stillness." That phrase, "the artificer of chastity..." we would not be too far off to add an emphasis – the artificer of chastity. The thing above all that makes chastity in the soul. So if you have found yourself falling into the same sin over and over in the matter of purity, take up the mighty weapon of fasting. You will start to take control over your body if you start to fast regularly, so that you are calling the shots and not your flesh.

And keep in mind what Our Lord said, speaking of demons, "But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting." Self control comes of this great spiritual work. Bl. Pope Paul VI wrote a good document about this matter, especially regarding the error of an improper hatred or condemnation of the flesh. Our purpose is not to destroy the flesh in any way, but to tame it, to bring it under control. He wrote, "This exercise of bodily mortification – far removed from any form of stoicism – does not imply a condemnation of the flesh which sons of God deign to assume."

In his apostolic constitution on penance, *Painitemini*, he explains this point clearly: "This exercise of bodily mortification—far removed from any form of stoicism—does not imply a condemnation of the flesh which sons of God deign to assume. On the contrary mortification aims

at the "liberation" of man, who often finds himself, because of concupiscence, almost chained by his own senses. Through "corporal fasting" man regains strength and the "wound inflicted on the dignity of our nature by intemperance is cured by the medicine of a salutary abstinence."

If then you resolve to fast, but are not used to it, then start with the basics, and hold to them rigorously. These are: Fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, abstaining from meat on Fridays, and strictly observing the Eucharistic fast, which is not eating or drinking (other than water) one hour before receiving Holy Communion.

The second step of good fasting is to do it without grumbling or complaining. This is crucial.

But Catholics should not be satisfied with the bare minimum. You'll want to build on this regimen. As St. Francis de Sales said, "If you are able to fast, you will do well to observe some days beyond what are ordered by the Church, for besides the ordinary effect of fasting in raising the mind, subduing the flesh, confirming goodness, and obtaining a heavenly reward, it is also a great matter to be able to control greediness, and to keep the sensual appetites and the whole body subject to the law of the Spirit; and although we may be able to do but little, the enemy nevertheless stands more in awe of those whom he knows can fast."

I need to write more about this absolutely essential means for purity, but in the meantime your plan should at least look like this:

Positive: 1. Regular Confession
Negative: 1. Basic fasting

On Gaining and Keeping Purity, V

St. Thomas continues: "Therefore, the first thing required in penance is the ordering of the mind; namely, that the mind be turned toward God, and turned away from sin, grieving at its commission, and proposing not to commit it; and this belongs essentially to contrition."

Now we are speaking about concrete means to keep and gain purity. At the top is confession. For anyone who has made the terrible decision to give themselves to impurity – such as the use of pornography – he must make a plan to combat it. I strongly recommend writing the plan out. There should be a positive column and a negative column, since ascetic theology always has a *via positiva* and *via negativa* (a positive and negative way). So the positive column should have as #1 to go to confession if a sin of impurity has occurred, and to go as soon as possible. The Council of Trent taught that quick repentance (going to confession quickly after sinning) is a sign of predestination for heaven. How's that for a good motivation!

Contrariwise, delaying confession is a sign of predestination to hell...an unwillingness to allow the Divine Physician to heal, and a willingness to remain sick.

Each of the elements that St. Thomas mentions are important here. That turning of the mind to toward God is first, and we spoke of that in the first few inserts. The turning away from sin is the second thing mentioned. And here, we must be practical.

Would that the turning be once and for all! But alas, this is quite rare. Instead, it is the usual experience of the man fallen into a pit of impurity that if he conceives a strong revulsion of impurity, a good

confession of it, and one or two other resolutions to climb out and not fall back in are insufficient. Usually, many resolutions are needed, many components, many good habits need to be started and maintained.

So if the first item in the positive column is confession, what is the first item in the negative? St. Thomas writes: "By this, then, it becomes evident that, after a man has secured remission of his sin by grace and has been brought back to the state of grace, he remains under an obligation, as a result of God's justice, to some penalty for the sin that he has committed. Now, if he imposes this penalty on himself by his own will, he is said to make satisfaction to God by this: inasmuch as he attains with labor and punishment the divinely established order by punishing himself for the sin, which order he had transgressed by sinning through following his own will. But, if he does not exact this penalty of himself, then, since things subject to divine providence cannot remain disordered, this penalty will be inflicted on him by God. Such a punishment is not called one of satisfaction, since it is not due to the choice of the one who suffers it; but it will be called purificatory, because through being punished by another he will be cleansed, as it were, until whatever disorder there was in him is brought back to proper order. Hence, there is this statement of the Apostle in 1 Corinthians (11:31-32): "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged, but whilst we are judged, we are chastised by the Lord, that we be not condemned with this world."

Thus, we need something to put in the negative column, and if we do this willingly, then so much the better for us. If I were you, I'd write fasting. Now there are