

QUESTION 147

Fasting

Next we have to consider fasting (*ieiunium*). And on this topic there are eight questions: (1) Is fasting an act of a virtue? (2) Which virtue is it an act of? (3) Does fasting fall under a precept? (4) Are some individuals excused from observing this precept? (5) What are the times for fasting? (6) Is eating just once required for fasting? (7) At which hour should those who are fasting have their meal? (8) What are the foods from which they have to abstain?

Article 1

Is fasting an act of a virtue?

It seems that fasting is not an act of a virtue (*ieiunium non sit actus virtutis*):

Objection 1: Every act of a virtue is accepted by God. But fasting is not always accepted by God—this according to Isaiah 58:3 (“Why have we fasted and You have not paid attention?”). Therefore, fasting is not an act of a virtue.

Objection 2: No act of a virtue departs from the mean for that virtue. But fasting departs from the mean for a virtue, which in the case of the virtue of abstinence is set in such a way that it supports the needs of the [individual’s] nature, whereas fasting takes something away from the needs of nature. Otherwise, those who were not fasting would not have the virtue of abstinence. Therefore, fasting is not a virtue.

Objection 3: That which belongs to everyone in general, both the good and the bad, is not an act of a virtue. But fasting is like this, since everyone is fasting before he eats. Therefore, fasting is not an act of a virtue.

But contrary to this: In 2 Corinthians 6:5-6 fasting is enumerated along with other acts of virtue, where the Apostle says, “... in acts of fasting, in knowledge, in chastity ...”

I respond: An act is virtuous by the fact that it is ordered by reason toward some upright good. But this is true of fasting, since fasting is undertaken mainly for the sake of three goods:

First, *in order to control the disordered desires of the flesh (ad concupiscentias carnis comprimendas)*. Hence, in the passage cited above the Apostle says, “... in acts of fasting ... in chastity,” because chastity is preserved by means of acts of fasting. For as Jerome puts it, “Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus freezes”—that is, lust grows cold through abstinence from food and drink.

Second, fasting is undertaken *in order that the mind might be elevated more freely for contemplating sublime things*. Hence, Daniel 10:3 reports that after his three-week fast, Daniel received a revelation from God.

Third, *in order to make satisfaction for sins*. Hence, Joel 2:12 says, “Turn to me in your hearts, in fasting and tears and mourning.”

And here is what Augustine says in one of the sermons in *De Oratione et Ieiunio*: “Fasting cleanses the mind, lifts up the understanding, subjects the flesh to the spirit, makes the heart contrite and humble, disperses the clouds of disordered sentient desire (*concupiscentiae nebulas dispergit*), and extinguishes the fire of lust, while enkindling the true light of chastity.” Hence, it is clear that fasting is an act of a virtue.

Reply to objection 1: It is possible for an act which is virtuous by its genus to be rendered sinful by certain sorts of adjoined circumstances. Hence, in the same place (Isaiah 58:4) it says, “Behold, your own will intrudes on the days of your fast,” and a little further on it is added, “Behold, you fast only to argue and quarrel, and you wickedly strike with your fist.” In *Pastoralis* Gregory comments on this by saying, “The will involves pleasure and the fist involves anger. In vain, therefore, is the body restrained through abstinence if the mind, let loose with disordered movements, spreads out into sins.” And in the

sermon alluded to above Augustine says, “Fasting does not love wordiness, thinks of wealth as superfluous, disdains pride, commends humility, helps a man to understand himself as weak and fragile.”

Reply to objection 2: As *Ethics 2* explains, the mean of a virtue is taken not from *quantity* but from *correct reasoning* (*secundum rationem rectam*). Now reason judges that for the sake of some special consideration—e.g., in order to avoid a *bodily* illness or in order to perform certain *bodily* feats more expeditiously—a given man should take less food than would be appropriate for him in ordinary circumstances (*secundum statum communem*). And, *a fortiori*, correct reasoning might order this toward avoiding *spiritual* evils and pursuing *spiritual* goods.

Still, it is not the case that correct reasoning withdraws from food to such an extent that the nature cannot be preserved. For as Jerome puts it, “It does not matter whether you kill yourself over a long time or within a short time,” and “Someone who afflicts his body without moderation—either by an excessive lack of food or by eating or sleeping too little—is offering a sacrifice of stolen goods.” Similarly, correct reasoning does not take away food to such an extent that the man is rendered incapable of performing the tasks that he ought to perform. Hence, Jerome says, “A reasonable man suffers a loss of dignity if he prefers fasting to acts of charity or all-night vigils to the well-being of his sensory powers.”

Reply to objection 3: The fasting which belongs to nature and by which someone is said to be fasting before he takes food consists in a pure negation. Hence, it cannot be posited as the act of a virtue; instead, what can be posited as the act of a virtue is only that act of fasting by which an individual, on the basis of a reasonable plan, abstains from food in some way (*ex rationali proposito a cibis aliquantulum abstinet*). Hence, the first of these is called ‘the fast of fasting’ (*ieiunium ieiunii*), whereas the second is called ‘the fast of an individual who is fasting’ (*ieiunium ieiunantis*), i.e., the fast of an individual who is doing something intentionally.

Article 2

Is fasting an act of [the virtue of] abstinence?

It seems that fasting is not an act of [the virtue of] abstinence:

Objection 1: In commenting on Matthew 17:20 (“Demons of this sort ...”) Jerome says, “Fasting is not only from food, but from everything alluring.” But this involves every virtue. Therefore, fasting is not specifically an act of [the virtue of] abstinence.

Objection 2: In a Lenten homily Gregory says, “The lenten fast is a tithe of the whole year.” But as was established above (q. 85, intro.), giving tithes is an act of [the virtue of] religion. Therefore, fasting is an act of [the virtue of] religion and not of [the virtue of] abstinence.

Objection 3: As has been explained (q. 143, a. 1 and q. 146, q. 1), abstinence is a part of temperance. But temperance is divided off from fortitude, which involves enduring difficulties—where difficulty seems to be especially present in fasting. Therefore, fasting is not an act of abstinence.

But contrary to this: Isidore says, “Fasting is moderation with respect to nourishment and abstaining from food.”

I respond: The subject matter of a habit is the same as the subject matter of its act. Hence, every virtuous act that has to do with a given subject matter belongs to the virtue which determines the mean in that subject matter. But the act of fasting has to do with food, in which [the virtue of] abstinence discovers the mean. Hence, it is clear that fasting is an act of [the virtue of] abstinence.

Reply to objection 1: Fasting, properly speaking, consists in abstaining from food. But, speaking metaphorically, fasting consists in abstaining from all harmful things, and these are sins most of all.

A possible alternative reply is that fasting, properly speaking, is abstinence from all things that are alluring, since, as has been explained (a. 1), an act ceases to be virtuous through any sort of adjoined

vices.

Reply to objection 2: As is clear from what was said above (q. 32, a. 1 and q. 85, a. 3), nothing prevents the act of one virtue from belonging to another virtue in the sense that it is ordered toward the end of that other virtue. Accordingly, nothing prevents an act of [the virtue of] fasting from belonging to [the virtue of] religion or to [the virtue of] chastity or to any other virtue.

Reply to objection 3: Insofar as fortitude is a specific virtue, it involves enduring not just any sort of difficulties, but only those difficulties that have to do with the danger of death. By contrast, enduring difficulties that arise from the absence of the pleasures of the sense of touch belongs to temperance and its parts. And such are the difficulties involved with fasting.

Article 3

Is fasting contained in a precept?

It seems that fasting is not contained in a precept:

Objection 1: *Precepts* are not given for acts of supererogation, which fall under *counsels* instead. But fasting is an act of supererogation; otherwise, it would have to be equally observed at all times and places. Therefore, fasting does not fall under a precept.

Objection 2: Anyone who transgresses a precept commits a mortal sin. Therefore, if fasting were contained in a precept, then all of those who are not fasting would be committing a mortal sin, and a huge trap would thereby be laid for men.

Objection 3: In *De Vera Religione* Augustine says, “The very Wisdom of God, having become a man by whom we are called to freedom, instituted a few most salutary sacraments that would hold together the community of the Christian people, i.e., the community of a free multitude under the one God.” But the freedom of the Christian people would, it seems, be impeded by a multitude of observances no less than by a multitude of sacraments. For in *Ad Inquisitiones Ianuarii* Augustine says, “There are those who oppress with servile burdens the very religion of ours which God’s mercy wished to be free with very clear and very few solemn sacraments.” Therefore, it seems that fasting should not have been placed under a precept by the Church.

But contrary to this: In *Ad Lucinum* Jerome, speaking of fasts, says, “Let each province keep to its own practice and think of the commands of its elders as apostolic laws.” Therefore, fasting is contained in a precept.

I respond: Just as it belongs to secular rulers to hand down legal precepts, which specify the precepts of natural law concerning those matters that have to do with the general welfare in temporal affairs, so, too, it belongs to ecclesiastical prelates to prescribe with statutes those matters that have to do with the general welfare of the faithful in the realm of spiritual goods.

Now it has been explained (a. 1) that fasting is useful for expunging and restraining sin and for elevating the mind to spiritual things. But each individual is obliged by natural reason to make use of fasting only to the extent that this is necessary for what has just been mentioned. And so fasting in general falls under a precept of the law of nature. On the other hand, the specification of a time for fasting and a manner of fasting that is appropriate and useful for the Christian people falls under a precept of positive law that is instituted by the prelates of the Church. And this is ‘the fasting of the Church’, and the other ‘the fasting of nature’ (*hoc est ieiunium Ecclesiae, aliud, naturae*).

Reply to objection 1: Fasting, considered in itself, does not name anything choiceworthy, but is instead something of a punishment. However, it is rendered choiceworthy insofar as it is useful for some end. And so, considered absolutely, it does not have the necessity of a precept; instead, it has the necessity of a precept for anyone who is in need of such a remedy. And since the multitude of men are

often in need of such a remedy—both because, as James 3:2 puts it, “We all commit offenses in many matters,” and also because, as Galatians 5:17 says, “The flesh lusts against the spirit”—it was fitting for the Church to institute certain fasts in common to be observed by everyone, not because she was subjecting to a precept what belongs absolutely speaking to supererogation, but because she was determining with specificity what is necessary in general.

Reply to objection 2: The precepts that are proposed in the manner of a general statute do not obligate everyone in the same way, but instead obligate them in the way that is required for the end intended by the lawmaker—and if an individual disdains the authority of the lawmaker by transgressing the statute, or if the statute is transgressed in such a way that the end intended by the lawmaker is impeded, then such a transgressor commits a mortal sin.

By contrast, if an individual fails to observe the statute for some reasonable cause—especially in a case in which even the lawmaker, if he were present, would not judge that the statute should be observed—then such a transgression would not constitute a mortal sin. And, hence, not everyone who fails to observe the fasts of the Church commits a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 3: Augustine is speaking here of things “which are neither contained in the authority of Sacred Scripture, nor found to be mandated by episcopal councils, nor corroborated by the customs of the universal Church.” But the fasts that fall under precepts are established in episcopal councils and corroborated by the customs of the universal Church. Nor are they contrary to the freedom of the faithful people, but are instead useful for impeding slavery to sin, which is incompatible with spiritual freedom. Of this Galatians 5:13 says, “You, brethren, have been called to freedom; only, do not make your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh.”

Article 4

Is everyone obligated to observe the fasting of the Church?

It seems that everyone is obligated to observe the fasting of the Church:

Objection 1: The precepts of the Church impose an obligation in the same way that the precepts of God do—this according to Luke 10:15 (“Whoever hears you hears me”). But everyone is obligated to observe the precepts of God. Therefore, everyone is likewise obligated to observe the fasts that are instituted by the Church.

Objection 2: Children might especially seem to be excused from fasting, because of their age. But children are not excused; for Joel 2:15 says, “Sanctify your fasting,” and what follows afterwards is this: “Gather together your little ones and your nursing infants.” Therefore, *a fortiori*, all others are obligated to observe the fasts.

Objection 3: Spiritual things should be preferred to temporal things, and necessary things to non-necessary things. But bodily labor is ordered toward temporal gain, and even though pilgrimages are ordered toward spiritual things, they are not necessary. Therefore, since fasting is ordered toward spiritual usefulness and is necessary because of the Church’s statute, it seems that the fasting of the Church should not be omitted because of a pilgrimage or because of bodily labor.

Objection 4: As is clear from the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 9:7, something should be done by one’s own will rather than by necessity. But the poor are used to fasting by necessity, because of a lack of food. Therefore, *a fortiori*, they should fast by their own will.

But contrary to this: It seems that no just man is obligated to fast. For the precepts of the Church do not obligate one in opposition to Christ’s teaching. But in Luke 5:34 our Lord says, “The ‘children’ of the bridegroom cannot fast as long as the bridegroom is with them.” But the bridegroom is with all just men, living within them spiritually; hence, in Matthew 28:20 our Lord says, “Behold, I am with you even

unto the consummation of the world.” Therefore, just men are not obligated to fast by the Church’s statute.”

I respond: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 96, a. 6), general statutes are proposed in a way that befits a multitude. And so in establishing them the lawmaker looks to what happens generally and for the most part. However, if, for an exceptional reason, something that is incompatible with the observance of the statute is found in the case of some individual, then the lawmaker does not intend to obligate such an individual to observe the statute.

Still, in such a case a distinction needs to be applied: For if the reason is evident, then a man can on his own licitly omit the observance of the precept—especially if there is a custom in place, or if recourse cannot be easily had to a superior. On the other hand, if the reason is a dubious one, then the individual should have recourse to a superior who has the power to grant dispensations in such cases.

And this is to be observed in the case of fasts which are instituted by the Church and to which everyone in general is obligated if there is no special impediment involved.

Reply to objection 1: The precepts of God are precepts of the natural law (*praecepta iuris naturalis*), which are necessary for salvation in their own right. By contrast, the statutes of the Church have to do with things that are necessary for salvation not in their own right but only because the Church institutes them. And so there can be impediments in light of which certain individuals are not obliged to observe fasts of the sort in question.

Reply to objection 2: In the case of children there is an especially evident case for not fasting, both because of a weakness of their nature by which it happens that they need food often without much being taken at any one time, and also because they need a lot of nutrition because of their need for growth, which comes from extra nutrition. And so as long as they are in the state of growing—which in most cases lasts until the end of their twenty-first year (*usque ad finem tertii septennii*)—they are not obligated to observe the fasts of the Church. Still, during this time it is good for them to exercise themselves in fasting, more or less, in a way that befits their age.

Sometimes, however, when some great tribulation threatens, children, too, are ordered to fast as a sign of a more severe penance—and even beasts of burden, as we read in *Jonah* 3:7, “Let neither men nor beasts taste anything or drink water.”

Reply to objection 3: It seems that a distinction needs to be drawn in the case of pilgrims and working people.

For if the pilgrimage and the labor of the work can be deferred or diminished without detriment to bodily health and to the external conditions that are required for conserving bodily life or spiritual life, then the fasts of the Church should not be omitted for their sake.

On the other hand, if it is necessary to begin the pilgrimage right away or to make long daily journeys or, again, to do a large amount of work, either for the sake of preserving one’s bodily life or for the sake of something necessary for the spiritual life, and if the fasts of the Church cannot be observed together with this, then a man is not obligated to fast. For it does not seem to have been Church’s intention, in instituting the fasts, to impede other pious causes or more necessary causes.

Still, in such cases one should seek the dispensation of a superior—except, perhaps, where there is a custom to this effect, since the prelates seem to consent by the very fact that they leave it unnoticed.

Reply to objection 4: Poor people who are able to gather together enough for them to have a meal are not excused by their poverty from the fasts of the Church. By contrast, the ones who seem to be excused from the fasts are those who beg for alms in piecemeal fashion and who are not able to gather together enough food for themselves at any one time.

Reply to the argument for the contrary: There are three ways in which these words of our Lord can be explained:

The first explanation comes from Chrysostom, who says, “The disciples, who are being called ‘children’ of the bridegroom, were as yet of a very weak disposition,” which is why “they are compared

to an old garment.” And while Christ was present to them in the body, they needed to be treated with kindness rather than trained with the austerity of a fast. And on this score, it is more appropriate that fasts be dispensed with in the case of the imperfect and novices than in the case of older and more perfect individuals. This is clear from the Gloss on Psalm 130:2 (“... like a weaned child with respect to his mother”).

The second explanation comes from Jerome, who says that our Lord is here talking about the fasts of the Old [Testament] observances. Hence, our Lord is hereby signifying that the apostles, who had to be filled with the newness of grace, were not to be detained in the old observances.

The third explanation comes from Augustine, who distinguishes two sorts of fasting. One of them pertains to “the humility of tribulation” and does not belong to perfect men, who are called ‘the children of the bridegroom’. Hence, where Luke says, “The ‘children’ of the bridegroom cannot fast,” Matthew says, “The ‘children’ of the bridegroom cannot mourn.” By contrast, the second sort of fast belongs to “the joy of a mind taken up into spiritual things.” And this sort of fasting is appropriate for perfect individuals.

Article 5

Are the times for the fasting of the Church appropriately specified?

It seems that the times for the fasting of the Church are not appropriately specified (*non determinentur convenienter tempora ieiunii ecclesiastici*):

Objection 1: We read in Matthew 4:1-2 that Christ began a fast immediately after His baptism. But we ought to imitate Christ—this according to 1 Corinthians 4:16 (“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”). Therefore, we ought to undertake a fast immediately after the Epiphany, on which the baptism of Christ is celebrated.

Objection 2: It is not permissible in the New Law to observe the ceremonial [precepts] of the Old Law. But fasts in certain specific months belong to the solemnities of the Old Law; for instance, Zachariah 8:19 says, “The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness and great solemnities.” Therefore, the fasts of specific months, which are called ‘the quarterly periods’, [i.e., Ember Days], are not appropriately observed in the Church.

Objection 3: According to Augustine in *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, just as there is a ‘fast of affliction’, so, too, there is a ‘fast of exultation’. But spiritual exaltation is especially present to the faithful because of Christ’s resurrection. Therefore, during the five weeks which the Church makes solemn because of our Lord’s resurrection, fasts ought be instituted on the Sundays, wherein the resurrection is commemorated.

But contrary to this is the common practice of the Church.

I respond: As was explained above (aa. 1 and 3), fasting is ordered toward two things, viz., (a) erasing sin and (b) elevating the mind to higher things. And so fasts were to be imposed specifically at those times in which men had to be purged from sin and in which the mind of the faithful had to be elevated to God through devotion.

This occurs mainly before the Paschal solemnity [i.e., Easter], in which sins are loosened through baptism, which is celebrated at the Easter Vigil, when our Lord’s burial is recalled, since, as Romans 6:4 puts it, “We are buried together with Christ by baptism into death.”

Again, on the Easter feast it is especially necessary for a man’s mind to be elevated through devotion to the glory of eternity, which Christ has initiated by rising. And so the Church established that one must fast immediately before the Easter solemnity and, for the same reason, during the vigils of the

principal feast days, in which it is necessary for us to be prepared to celebrate the upcoming feasts with devotion.

Again, the custom of the Church has likewise been that Holy Orders be conferred in each quarter of the year (as a sign of which our Lord fed four thousand men with seven loaves of bread, and this, as Jerome says, “signifies the year of the New Testament), for the reception of which those who are ordaining, and those to be ordained, and also the whole people for whose benefit they are ordained, have to be made ready through fasting. Hence, we read in Luke 6:12 that before choosing His disciples, our Lord went out to the mountain to pray—and in expounding this verse, Ambrose says, “What would it be appropriate for you to do when you want to fulfill a duty of piety, given that Christ, about to send out His apostles, prayed beforehand?”

Now according to Gregory, the meaning of the number of the forty-day fast [of Lent] is threefold. First, “because the power of the decalogue is fulfilled in the four books of the holy Gospel, and ten multiplied by four is forty.” Again, “because in this mortal body we are composed of the four elements through whose inclinations we transgress the precepts of the Lord that are received through the decalogue. Hence, it is fitting for us to afflict this same flesh forty times.” Again, “because in this way we give to God a tithe of our days. For since a year lasts for three hundred and sixty days, we afflict ourselves for thirty-six days, which are the fast days during the six weeks of Lent, as if giving tithes of our year to God.”

Now according to Augustine, a fourth reason is added: The creator is a Trinity, *Father* and *Son* and *Holy Spirit*. But the number three is appropriate for the invisible creature, since we are commanded to love God “with our whole *heart* and with our whole *soul* and with our whole *mind*.” On the other hand, the number four is appropriate for the visible creature because of the *hot* and the *cold* and the *moist* and the *dry*. So, then, the number ten signifies all the things, which yields the number forty if it is multiplied by four, which belongs the body through which we make use of things. On the other hand, each fast of the Ember days is composed of three days, either because of the number of months in each season or because of the number of Holy Orders which are conferred at these times.

Reply to objection 1: Christ needed baptism not for His own sake, but in order to commend baptism to us. And so it was proper for Him to fast not before His own baptism but after His baptism, in order to invite us to fast before our own baptism.

Reply to objection 2: The Church keeps the fasts of the four seasons, [i.e., the Ember Days] neither at the same times that the Jews did nor for the same reasons.

For the Jews used to fast in July, which is the fourth month from April (which they counted as the first month), since it was in July that Moses, descending from Mount Sinai, broke the tablets of the Law (Exodus 32) and that, according to Jeremiah 39:2, the walls of the city [of Jerusalem] were first broken through.

Again, in the fifth month, which is called August among us, when sedition arose among the people because of the spies, they were ordered not to go up the mountain (Numbers 14), and in this month the temple in Jerusalem was burned down by Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 52) and later by Titus .

Again, in the seventh month, which is called October among us, Godolias was killed and the rest of the people were dispersed (Jeremiah 51).

And in the tenth month, which is called January among us, the people who were with Ezechiel in captivity heard that the temple had been destroyed (Ezechiel 4).

Reply to objection 3: The ‘fast of exultation’ proceeds from the movement of the Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of freedom. And so this fast should not fall under a precept. Therefore, the fasts which are instituted by an ecclesiastical precept are instead ‘fasts of affliction’, which are not appropriate on days of joy. For this reason, there is no fast instituted by the Church during the entirety of the Easter season or, again, on Sundays.

If some individuals fasted during these times, contrary to the custom of the Christian people (which

custom, as Augustine says, “should be thought of as law”), even because of some error, in the way that the Manicheans fast because they think that such a fast is necessary, they were not immune from sin, even though fasting itself, considered in its own right, is praiseworthy at every time—this according to Jerome in *Ad Lucinum* (“Would that we could fast at every time!”).

Article 6

Is it required for fasting that a man eat just once?

It seems that it is not required for fasting that a man eat just once:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 2), fasting is an act of the virtue of abstinence, which observes the appropriate quantity of food no less than the appropriate number of meals. But there is no quantity of food determined for those who are fasting. Therefore, neither should there be a determinate number of meals.

Objection 2: Just as a man is nourished by food, so, too, he is nourished by drink. Hence, drinking likewise breaks a fast, and, for this reason, we cannot receive the Eucharist after drinking. Now we are not prohibited from drinking more than once at different hours of the day. Therefore, those who are fasting should likewise not be prohibited from eating more than once.

Objection 3: Digestive aids are a sort of food. But they are taken by many after eating on days of fasting. Therefore, taking a single meal is not part of the nature of fasting.

But contrary to this is the common custom of the Christian people.

I respond: Fasting is instituted by the Church in order to keep excessive desires under control (*ad concupiscentiam refrenandam*), but in such a way that the individual’s nature is preserved. Now what seems to be sufficient for this is a single meal, by which a man (a) is able to satisfy his nature and yet (b) takes something away from excessive desire by minimizing the number of meals. And so it has been established by the Church’s moderation that those who are fasting should eat once a day.

Reply to objection 1: It is not the case that the same quantity of food could be determined for everyone, in light of the diverse bodily compositions, because of which one would need more food and another less. But everyone, for the most part, can satisfy his nature with a single meal.

Reply to objection 2: There are two types of fasts:

One is the *fast of nature*, which is required for reception of the Eucharist. This fast is broken by any sort of drink, even water, after which the reception of the Eucharist is not permitted.

The other is the *fast of the Church*, which is the fast of an individual who is fasting (*ieiunium ieiunantis*). And this fast is broken only by those things that the Church intends to forbid in instituting the fast. But the Church does not intend to command abstinence with respect to drink, which is taken more to alter the body for digesting the food that has been eaten rather than for nutrition, even though it does in some way provide nourishment. And so it is permissible for those who are fasting to drink more than once. However, if an individual were to make use of drink in an immoderate way, then he could commit a sin and lose the merit of fasting, just as if he were to take food in an immoderate way in his one meal.

Reply to objection 3: Even if digestive aids provide nourishment in some way, they are nonetheless taken mainly for the digestion of the food and not for nutrition. Hence, they do not break the fast, just as the taking of other medicines does not break the fast—unless perhaps, with a deceitful intention, an individual takes digestive aids in a large quantity in the manner of food.

Article 7

Is the ninth hour appropriately designated as the time to eat for those who are fasting?

It seems that the ninth hour, [i.e., 3:00pm], is not appropriately designated as the time to eat for those who are fasting:

Objection 1: The status of the New Testament is more perfect than the status of the Old Testament. But in the Old Testament they fasted up until evening (*usque ad vesperam*); for instance, Leviticus 23:32 says, “It is the sabbath ... you shall afflict your souls,” and later on, “You shall celebrate your sabbaths from evening until evening.” Therefore, *a fortiori*, in the New Testament the fast should be commanded to last until the evening.

Objection 2: A fast instituted by the Church is imposed on everyone. But not everyone is able to know determinately when the ninth hour is occurring. Therefore, it seems that the designation of the ninth hour should not be contained in the statute about fasting.

Objection 3: As was explained above (a. 2), fasting is an act of the virtue of abstinence. But a moral virtue does not set the mean in the same way for everyone, since, as *Ethics 2* points out, “What counts as a lot for one individual counts as a little for another.” Therefore, the ninth hour should not be designated for those who are fasting.

But contrary to this: The Council of Chalons says, “During Lent those who have eaten before the celebration of the office of Vespers are by no means to be credited with fasting”—where, during the time of Lent, Vespers is said after the ninth hour. Therefore, one should be fasting up to the ninth hour.

I respond: As has been explained (aa. 1-3), fasting is ordered toward the erasure and prevention of sin. Hence, it has to add something over and beyond the ordinary practice, but in such a way that the individual’s nature is not much harmed thereby.

Now the custom of men eating around the sixth hour, [i.e., 12:00pm], is both common and appropriate, both because (a) digestion is seemingly finished (with the natural heat having withdrawn inwardly at night time because of the surrounding cold of the night), as is the diffusion of the humor through the limbs, which the heat of the day contributes to until the sun has reached its zenith, and also because (b) it is mainly at this time that the nature of the human body needs assistance against the external heat that is in the air, lest the humors burn off within.

And so, in order that the one fasting should feel some affliction as a satisfaction for sin, the appropriate hour for eating is designated as the ninth. This hour also fits in with the mystery of Christ’s passion, which was completed at the ninth hour when, “bowing His head, He gave up His spirit” (Matthew 27:46). For when those who are fasting afflict their own flesh, they are conformed to the passion of Christ—this according to Galatians 5:24 (“They who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh, with its vices and disordered desires”).

Reply to objection 1: The status of the Old Testament is comparable to night, whereas the status of the New Testament is comparable to day—this according to Romans 13:12 (“The night has passed and the day is at hand”). And so in the Old Testament they fasted until the night (*usque ad noctem*), but not in the New Testament.

Reply to objection 2: Fasting requires a specific hour not by a strict measurement but by a rough estimate, since it is enough that it be somewhere around the ninth hour. And anyone can easily ascertain this.

Reply to objection 3: A slight increase, or even a slight decrease, cannot do much harm. And there is not a long period of time from the sixth hour, at which men have generally been accustomed to have a meal, to the ninth hour, which is specified for those who are fasting. And so such a specification of the time cannot do much harm to anyone, no matter what their condition is.

An alternative reply is that if, because of sickness, age, or some similar reason, this were to expose

certain people to a grave danger, then they should be dispensed from fasting or allowed to move the hour ahead by a little.

Article 8

Is it fitting for those who are fasting to be ordered to abstain from meat, eggs, and milk products?

It seems that it is not fitting for those who are fasting to be ordered to abstain from meat, eggs, and milk products (*inconvenienter ieiunantibus indicatur abstinentia a carnibus et ovis et lacticiniis*):

Objection 1: It was explained above (a. 6) that fasting is instituted to keep the disordered sentient desires of the flesh under control. But the drinking of wine provokes disordered sentient desire more than eating meat does—this according to Proverbs 20:1 (“Wine is a licentious thing”) and Ephesians 5:18 (“Do not get drunk on wine, for therein lies debauchery”). Therefore, since the drinking of wine is not forbidden to those who are fasting, it seems that neither should eating meat be forbidden.

Objection 2: Some fish are eaten with as much pleasure as certain animal meats. But as was established above, sentient desire is the appetite for what is pleasurable. Therefore, in the case of fasting, which is instituted in order to keep disordered sentient desire under control, the use of meat should not be forbidden, in the same way that the use of fish is not forbidden.

Objection 3: On certain days of fast some individuals make use of eggs and cheese. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, a man is able to make use of such things during the Lenten fast.

But contrary to this is the common practice of the faithful.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 6), fasting was instituted by the Church to restrain the disordered sentient desires of the flesh. These are desires for the pleasures of the sense of touch, which consist in food and sex. And so the Church denied to the ones fasting those foods which both (a) are the most pleasurable to eat and, again, (b) move man most of all toward sexual activity (*maxime hominem ad venerea provocant*). Now such is the meat of animals that live and breathe on the earth, along with what proceeds from them, e.g., milk products from grazing animals and eggs from birds. Since food items of this sort are more conformed to the human body, they give more pleasure and confer more nutrition on the human body, and so from their consumption there is more left over to be converted into seminal matter, the increase of which is a great inducement to lust. And this is why the Church has commanded those who are fasting to abstain from these foods especially.

Reply to objection 1: Three things come together for an act of generation, viz., *heat, vital spirits,* and *humors*. Wine contributes to heat most of all, along with other things that make the body warm, and flatulent foods seem to effect vital spirits, whereas the use of meat, from which much nutrition is generated, makes for humors most of all. Now changes in heat and in the multiplication of spirits pass quickly, whereas the substance of humors remains for a long time. And this is why the use of meat is forbidden more than the use of wine or of the use beans, which are flatulent foods.

Reply to objection 2: In instituting a fast, the Church looks to what occurs more commonly. But eating meat is generally more pleasurable than eating fish, even if in some cases things are otherwise. And this is why the Church prohibits the eating of meat for those who are fasting rather than the eating of fish.

Reply to objection 3: Eggs and milk products are forbidden to those who fast insofar as they originate from animals which have meat and which hence are more principally forbidden than are eggs and milk products.

Similarly, the Lenten fast is the most solemn of all the fasts, both because it is kept in imitation of Christ, and also because it disposes us toward celebrating with the devotion the mysteries of our

redemption. For this reason eating meat is forbidden in every fast, whereas during the Lenten fast eggs and milk products are also universally forbidden.

With respect to abstinence from eggs and milk products in other fasts, there are different customs among different groups of people, and each individual should observe these customs in accord with the practice of those among whom he lives. This is why, in speaking of fasts, Jerome says: "Let each province keep to its own practice and think of the commands of its elders as apostolic laws."