



February 18, 1877

Replacing the Lenten Fast
with a Very Strict Observance of the Rule

Dear Daughters,

I have only a few recommendations to make to you today.

We are now at the beginning of Lent, and few of us can observe all the prescriptions of the Church. I want to tell you, for your peace and consolation, that it is a general rule in the Church that those who teach three or four hours a day are exempt from fasting. Thus, in seminaries, professors, who some say have three, others four hours of classes a day, do not fast. It is therefore a great comfort for those of you who teach to think that your very condition exempts you from fasting. For the others, there are health and strength limitations that prevent them from following all the prescriptions of Lent.

But, since no one is exempt from doing penance, the penance especially proposed to Religious is to bring great fervor to the practice of their Rule; for example, much greater adherence to silence, greater fervor in prayer through fidelity in not giving in to distractions during prayer and in putting away all useless thoughts throughout the day, in order to occupy themselves with the Mysteries of Our Lord. There is no state of health that cannot withstand this. Or again, we will strive to perform acts of humility; we will put ourselves in the position of accepting every wrong, taking the last place in relation to our Sisters, showing ourselves to be gentle and humble in every interaction, avoiding complaining and blaming, maintaining great outward modesty and gentleness of speech, never raising our voices—an infinite number of such things that exist in life—outward forms of subjugation and sacrifice, which, for the sake of the inner life, require an effort and work that everyone can undertake.

I will also say that, since everyone has faults, it is a very good penance to work more generously toward their destruction during Lent, to perform the acts that are opposed to them, and to practice the virtues that cost us the most.

Each of you, at the beginning of Lent, must consider what you will offer to God in place of the austerities you cannot undertake. I know from experience that we would be much happier if we could observe all the fasts. We would have a clearer conscience. But perhaps we would also not seek to do penance beyond that, and God, who desires the good of our souls, does not give us the strength to fast so that we would do something else that costs us much more.