

**Jim's Notes**  
**September 27, 2006**  
**The Gospel According to St. Matthew 6:14-18**

**Matthew 6:14-15**

**St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)**

Nothing makes us so like God as our readiness to forgive the wicked and wrongdoer. For it is God who has made 'the sun to shine on the evil and on the good.'

For this same reason again in everyone of the clauses Jesus commands us to make our prayers together in one voice, saying, 'our Father,' and 'thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,' and 'give us the bread, and forgive us our debts,' and 'lead us not into temptation,' and 'deliver us.' So everywhere he is teaching us to use this plural word that we may not retain so much as a vestige of resentment against our neighbor.

How great a reproof then must they deserve, who, after all this, still do not forgive and even ask God's vengeance on their enemies. In doing so they diametrically transgress this command. Meanwhile Christ is seeking in every way possible to hinder our conflicts with one another. For since love is the root of all that is good, by removing from all quarters whatever mars it he brings us together and cements us to each other. For there is not one, not a single one, whether father or mother or friend, who loves us as much as the God who created us. (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 19.7)

**St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)**

And certainly we should not heedlessly neglect to call attention to the fact that of all the pronouncements in which the Lord has, ordered us to pray, he has deliberately attached a very special commendation to the pronouncement that deals with the forgiving of sins. In this pronouncement he wished us to be merciful because that is the only prescribed means of avoiding miseries. Indeed, in no other petition do we pray in such a manner as to make a kind of covenant with the Lord, for we say, 'Forgive us as we also forgive.' If we default in this covenant, the whole petition is fruitless, for he says, 'For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' (Sermon on the Mount 2.11.39).

**Matthew 6:16**

**St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)**

In this spectacle we not only imitate the hypocrites, but also we far outdo them. We sigh loudly and complain bitterly. I know some, well-actually I know many, who, even while neglecting to fast, yet still wear the garments of those who fast. They cloak themselves with a false exoneration worse than their actual sin.

'I do this,' they say, 'so that I might not offend the many [who are expecting me to fast].' What are you saying? The divine law commands this [fasting], and yet you say you are causing 'offense' by obeying? If you practice the inward fast you cause offense, but if you do not fast inwardly [but make a show of fasting outwardly], then quite the opposite, you are not causing offense? Is there anything more foolish than this? Why don't you stop being worse than the hypocrites [you criticize], doubling your own hypocrisy, and instead consider to what extremes this great evil leads? Do you feel any shame now, as we look at the emphasis [of the passage] before us? For Jesus not only says that they put on

appearances, but he levels [an even more] vehement attack against them when he says, "They disfigure their faces." (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 20.1)

**Matthew 6:17-18**

**St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)**

Vainglory can find a place not only in the splendor and pomp of worldly wealth but even in the sordid garment of sackcloth as well. It is then all the more dangerous because it is a deception under the pretense of service to God. When one dazzles by immoderate adornment of the body and its raiment or by the splendor of whatever else one may possess, by that very fact one is easily shown to desire ostentatious display. This person deceives nobody by a crafty semblance of holiness. But if, through extraordinary squalor and shabbiness, one is attracting others' attention to one's manner of professing Christianity, and if one is doing this of choice and not merely enduring it through necessity, then one may determine by one's other works whether one is doing it through an indifference toward needless adornment or through ambition of some kind. Indeed, the Lord has forewarned us to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing: 'By their fruits you shall know them' (Matthew 7:16). Trials of one kind or another that cause these people to lose the very advantages they have gained through their dress or claimed to deny what they sought to gain by it will inevitably reveal whether it is a case of a wolf under a sheep's skin or a sheep under its own. But just as sheep ought not to change their skin even though wolves sometimes hide themselves beneath it, so a Christian ought not try to delight the eyes of others by needless adornment just because pretenders very often assume that scanty garb which necessity demands and assume it for the purpose of deceiving those who are less aware. (Sermon on the Mount 2.12.41)

**Laws of the Church on Fasting and Abstinence  
From the Code of Canon Law**

Canon 1249: All members of the Christian faithful in their own way are bound to do penance in virtue of divine law; in order that all may be joined in a common observance of penance, penitential days are prescribed in which the Christian faithful in a special way pray, exercise works of piety and charity, and deny themselves by fulfilling their responsibilities more faithfully and especially by observing fast and abstinence according to the norm of the following canons.

Canon 1250: All Fridays through the year and the time of Lent are penitential days and times throughout the universal Church.

Canon 1251: Abstinence from eating meat or another food according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops is to be observed on Fridays throughout the year unless they are solemnities; abstinence and fast are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and on the Friday of the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Canon 1252: All persons who have completed their fourteenth year are bound by the law of abstinence; all adults are bound by the law of fast up to the beginning of their sixtieth year. Nevertheless, pastors and parents are to see to it that minors who are not bound by the law of fast and abstinence are educated in an authentic sense of penance.

Canon 1253: It is for the conference of bishops to determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence and to substitute in whole or in part for fast and abstinence other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety.

(Code of Canon Law, 1983)

### **Explanation and Application of the Canons:**

**Abstinence:** Catholics in the United States, from the age of 14 throughout life, are obliged to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, the Fridays of Lent and Good Friday. The law forbids the use of meat, but not of eggs, the products of milk or condiments made of animal fat. Permissible are soup flavored with meat, meat gravy and sauces. The obligation to abstain from meat is not in force on days celebrated as solemnities (e.g., Christmas, Sacred Heart).

**Fasting:** Catholics in the United States, from the day after their 18th birthday to the day after their 59th birthday, are also obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The law allows only one full meal a day, but does not prohibit the taking of some food in the morning and evening, observing as far as quantity and quality are concerned approved local custom. The order of meals is optional, i.e., the full meal may be taken in the evening instead of at midday.

Also:

1. The combined quantity of food taken at the two lighter meals should not exceed the quantity taken at the full meal.
2. The drinking of ordinary liquids does not break the fast.

**Obligation:** There is a general obligation to do penance for sins committed and for the remission of punishment resulting from sin. Substantial observance of fasting and abstinence, prescribed for the community of the Church, is a matter of serious obligation; it allows, however, for alternate ways of doing penance (e.g., works of charity, prayer and prayer-related practices, almsgiving).

(*The Catholic Almanac*, 2003, p. 171)