

THE SHEPHERDS WALKING STICK

I trust that you have taken seriously the obligation to fast and abstain during the Ash Wednesday. Our times call for it. Aside from the spiritual benefits which I have mentioned in my last post, the discipline of Lent affirms our Catholic identity. Abstaining from serving meat on the family table during Fridays of Lent, for example, will give the impression on our children that the faith is taken seriously at home.....

Of course, it is also important to know the reasons for the discipline. Some of you might be wondering: Is eating an expensive lobster more penitential than refraining from eating steak? Why is it that one may eat fish and not flesh meat during Fridays (of Lent especially)? St. Thomas Aquinas gives us a couple of reasons. Firstly, he said that it was on a Friday that Christ offered his body on the cross for our salvation. He gave up his flesh, so we also give up flesh meat. Secondly, he said, *"Fasting was instituted by the Church in order to bridle the concupiscences of the flesh, which regard pleasures of touch in connection with food and sex. Wherefore the Church forbade those who fast to partake of those foods which both afford most pleasure to the palate, and besides are a very great incentive to lust."* He means to say that there is more pleasure in eating meat than eating seafood even if it is an expensive lobster. Of course, eating lobster on Ash Wednesday or Good Friday is contrary to the spirit of penance, and should not be done. Moreover, some people will not agree that eating meat is more pleasurable than eating seafood. But, we are speaking here of the general populace. We can see how steakhouses greatly outnumber seafood restaurants. St. Thomas further connects this pleasure for meat to the pleasure to sin especially the sin of lust (which is oftentimes called sin of the flesh) which is the stronger among our many inclinations. I think even medical science would back up St. Thomas' teaching. Science would say that protein found in meat will increase testosterone level in men and fertility levels in women, and it thus connected with sexual libido. Abstaining from meat of warm-blooded animals, therefore, means that we are opening ourselves to God's grace to help fight temptations to sin.