

LENT 2017

Practice fasting by ...

limiting your 'screen time' today and resting calmly in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Limit your screen time in order to just rest in the Holy Spirit. As your body enjoys the rest, enjoy the time with the Holy Spirit.

Practice fasting by ...

turning off the TV in the afternoon and going out to visit one lonely shut-in. Enjoy the coffee and the conversation but listen to a heart that needs that human touch.

Practice fasting by ...

taking time to read and study the Scriptures with love. Go to the Word of God as you would to food. Be nourished. Drink deeply of God's love and mercy.

Practice fasting by ...

sharing of your time and energy to help a new Canadian learn their English, help a neighbor boy(in grade three) improve his reading skills or taking the elderly relative grocery shopping. Be assistance in the life of others.

WE WANT TO RECOVER FASTING

We moderns are too quick to discount the ancients. 'They were just a bunch of old timers.' In our arrogance we think that we have discovered all there is to know.

Rather, we need to recognize that we stand on the shoulders of many wise women and men who understood the journey of the spiritual life.

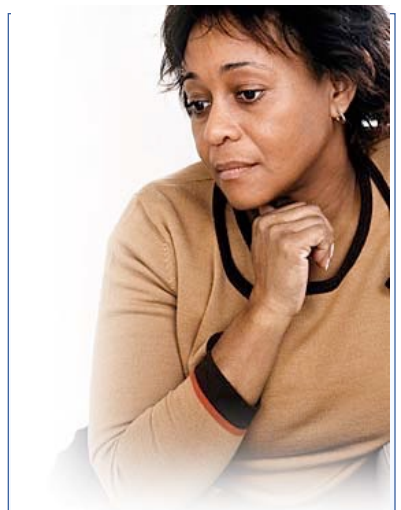
When we walk with God we will use all our physical powers, our intellectual powers but most of all the powers of our heart.

The body is very much a part of our journey with God. Too often we have limited our service of God to our brain and our voice. We neglected an essential part of our life, our body.

This is why the practice of fasting has always been a part of the spiritual journey. What we do with our body (experience its limitations) is what we are doing with our spirit (experiencing our limitations) as we walk towards our God.

It would be wrong to consider limiting our food intake (to control our weight) and consider that this is fasting in the spiritual sense.

We are disciplining our body in order that our spirit turns towards our God. We are denying ourselves certain 'enjoyments' in order to give stronger service to our God. The reason we fast is to enter into a stronger relationship with the Risen Lord. Fasting always has a goal, spiritual growth. →



Jesus went out into the wilderness to search for God. This was an intense period of his life but one which has as its goal, searching for the will of God. We know that this was a season of prayer and fasting. He disciplined his body in order that his spirit (the deep energy of his life) would seek God. He sets the standard: Jesus fasted, we fast!

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One fifteen year old male looked askance: "Why would you ever want to fast?" Is the act of fasting a deprivation (with only negative connotations) or is it an act of discipline that leads closer to God? Is fasting negative or positive? Is fasting worth promoting or is should it be dropped into the dustbins of history?

We are living in time where we want to rediscover this great treasure of fasting. It spoke loudly to the Christians of old and it has the potential to help our spiritual lives.

Use this bulletin to help you reflect and share with others the contribution fasting can make to our spiritual lives.

When people consider fasting they focus first on food and drink. This is where its effects are strongly felt.

Many people will fast from eating deserts or sweets during Lent. They will not have any deserts with their meals and try to avoid any snacks that are sweet. Many have strong memories of wishing their mother would bake a chocolate cake during Lent (and this was not forthcoming).

Some people limit their intake of coffee. During Lent I will only have one cup of coffee in the morning, and not two cups! Some will not have that evening beer.

Each is a physical deprivation. Each is an action that puts our body and soul in touch with our effort to turn towards our God. Only limited coffee during each day means that we are focusing on our life with God. Our focus must be straight: we feel the deprivation in order to give our first attention to our God.

But fasting must not be limited to the physical side of our life.

In the old days people recall smokers who would quit cold turkey on Ash Wednesday but then be miserable for forty days while they 'fasted' from cigarettes. Fasting directs us in the opposite direction. We fast in order that we become

more charitable towards our neighbor.

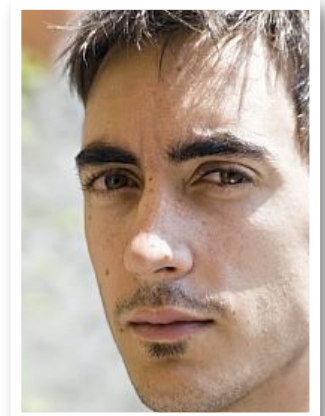
We need to give some attention towards our attitudes.

I will fast from making critical comments about people who are not as productive as I am, or do not keep their house as clean as I keep my house, or do not volunteer to help family members like I volunteer to help my relatives.

We live in a world where people use the media (commercial media and personal media) to make all kinds of hurtful comments about others. They refuse to take responsibility for any pain they may have caused because of their negative and cutting words.

These people may be in their mid-forties but their tongue is no more than that of the school yard bully.

When we consider fasting, we want to consider the most sinful part of our lives, that is, our tongue. This is the first area of our lives that needs fasting.



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Make fasting positive and pro-active

The practice of fasting needs to be done in a very positive atmosphere. There may be the danger that we will give up eating sweets during Lent but continue to lead our over-busy lives that center only on our concerns. We may give our attention to God only at meal times and steer away from the concerns that preoccupy our entire day.

There are very sincere people who will tell you that during the season of Lent they will give up their afternoon TV time (to do what they actually enjoy) in order to go out and visit the shut-ins, the elderly, the forgotten in our nursing

homes and to be attentive to those undergoing cancer treatment.

This is not fasting 'from' but rather fasting 'towards.'

These are people who practice a very pro-active type of fasting. They do not abstain from some things, but rather embrace of charitable practice. At first glance, this may seem very positive and easy. But once we have committed to visiting our elderly aunt who has advanced dementia we may find that it takes some serious commitment of time and effort. They may have to learn to discipline themselves to be quiet and just be present to their aged aunt who may not even recognize them any more.

We live at a period of time where we need to rediscover and redefine

the meanings of fasting for our spiritual lives.

Many people might be very confused as we try to expand our understanding of what it means to fast. All must be done in an atmosphere of searching for our God and moving out in greater love and charity towards our neighbors.

The opportunities to be more positive in our fasting are countless. No one has to search very far to see where they can give of their own lives. Look at the elderly neighbor who needs a little more attention since she has no family around here. All their close friends have died. Fast from being focused on yourself and have a coffee with the elderly neighbor. Your friendship and coffee will be a time of fasting.

Lord Jesus,

may I fast from any selfish language, angry words and excuses to avoid helping anyone in need.

Lord Jesus,

may all my energy that I use in fasting be directed to seeking your will, and in growing to love the poor and the dispossessed of this world

You will only fast if.....

- you are in touch with your own self-centeredness and know your distance from God.
- the Holy Spirit is leading you closer in friendship with God.

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The discipline of fasting will..
..alert your hunger for the mercy of God.
.. stimulate you to greater charity and love for the poor.
.. keep you close to the humble ground so that you do not become too puffed up with pride and self-aggrandizement



PRAYER FOR SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Based on the Gospel of Luke

With the publican of the Gospel, let us say

All: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!

L: You come to look for the lost sheep;
joyfully you carry it on your shoulders,
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!

L: You go out to meet the prodigal son;
you clasp him in your arms and kiss him –
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!

L: You choose as your apostle Matthew the tax-collector;
you have not come to call the righteous, but sinners–
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!

L: You enter the house of Zaccheus the tax-collector
in order to seek out and save what was lost –
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!

L: You accept the ointment of the sinful woman;
because of her tears you pardon and defend her –
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!

L: To the good thief who implores you,
you open the gate of Paradise –
we beg you:

All: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!