

LENT NEWSLETTER

FASTING REDISCOVERED



Why did fasting play a significant role in the spiritual lives of so many holy women and men that have gone before us? Why would anyone in ancient times (when food was short) cut themselves short of nourishment? Fasting of itself does not make any sense.

Lent has carried with it a heavy emphasis on fasting. Every adult is expected to deny themselves in some way but why? Jesus, in line with a long history of holy women and men, went out to the wilderness and he fasted? (Mt. 4,

1-11) He fasted and he was hungry!

Lent is a more intense walking with Jesus. Our fasting is modeled on his fasting and his struggles to turn toward God with all that he had.

Fasting means to deny ourselves some of the necessities of life, such as food. It may also mean that we could deny ourselves some of the ordinary enjoyments of life, such as a cold beer or our special TV program. Fasting always seeks a very spiritual purpose.

HOW TO USE THIS BULLETIN

We all have had the funny experience of people who complain that they have pain in their shoulder. They are very dissatisfied with the serious discomfort.

You ask: What are you going to do about it?

Well, these dissatisfied people refuse to enter a more disciplined life of doing the exercises that will ease the pain over a few days. Getting your shoulder to work again takes a lot of discipline.

The spiritual life demands discipline. It takes effort and concentrated discipline. If we do nothing, then nothing will happen!

This week we invite you to focus your attention on the very traditional practice of fasting. What does it mean to fast from food and alcohol? Can we begin to understand fasting in a much broader context? Can fasting open new doors and insights?



LENT IS A TIME FOR FASTING

Christians have got it right. We do not pray and serve God only out of the spiritual (i.e., what you cannot touch). We are both body and soul. When we pray and walk the forty days of Lent we do so with our body and our soul.

The first purpose of fasting is to discipline our body and all its appetites so that our spirit (our person) will hunger and seek out the things of God.

When you deprive yourself of some food or the particular pleasure things like chocolate give you, you are placing yourself in the space where you can turn towards God. The hunger of your body is meant to spur your soul to turn to God.

Deprivation is never sufficient of itself. When I deny myself a nice steak for dinner tonight in order to share the price of that steak with the poor of this world, it must never stop there.

Fasting always leads to feasting. If we only fast from the pleasure and security that food and drink give us we will just become miserable and be a bearcat of a person towards your family.

But fasting leads us to feast on the virtues that God wants us to live and practice.

As you reflect in this bulletin on fasting turn towards page three and slowly reflect on each of the suggestions. Yes fast from.... but turn toward and feast on..... Every deprivation leads to a stronger practice of virtue and strength.

Fast from sharp and critical remarks about the failures of others and plants words that support and nourish the lives of others.

Break with thinking that you are the center of all life (i.e, you are always talking about yourself and your own projects) and feast on the workings of God. Feast on the love and mercy that comes from the heart of God on this very day. Pay attention to how God is leading (or should we say shoving) you to a stronger practice of charity and compassion

BE GUIDED IN YOUR FASTING

There is great wisdom about the meaning of fasting from the great fathers of the Church. Here is a reflection from the great St. St. John Chrysostom,(347-407 AD). We do not have to reinvent the wheel but we have much to learn from the wisdom of our forefathers and foremothers.

"Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works.

If you see a poor man, take pity on him.

If you see a friend being honoured, do not envy him.

Do not let only your mouth fast, but also the eye and the ear and the feet and the hands
and all the members of our bodies.

Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice.

Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin.

Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful.

Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip.

Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism.

For what good is it if we abstain from birds and fishes, but bite and devour our brothers?



EIGHT MOMENTS TO EXAMINE MY FASTING

Fasting means coming to terms with my own sinful and selfish attitudes, words and practices. But we must never stop there. Fasting always leads to the practice of goodness, peace and service. Fasting always leads to strengthening the practice of virtue. It is very similar to working the soil in Springtime. It is never sufficient to pull all the weeds and have a clean patch of dirt. You need to plant potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce and cabbage.

Use each of these points to see where you are pulling out the weeds and where you are planting vegetables that will nourish and sustain your life.

Fast from emphasis on differences, and feast on the unity of life.
Fast from apparent darkness, and feast on the reality of light.

Fast from thoughts of illness, and feast on the healing power of God.
Fast from words that pollute, and feast on the phrases that purify.
Fast from discontent, and feast on gratitude.

Fast from discouragement, and feast on hope.

Fast from anger, and feast on optimism.
Fast from personal anxiety, and feast on eternal truth.



Fast from the shadows of sorrow, and feast on the sunlight of serenity.
Fast from idle gossip, and feast on purposeful silence.
Fast from judging others, and feast on the Christ within them.

Fast from facts that depress, and feast on truths that uplift.
Fast from lethargy, and feast on enthusiasm.
Fast from suspicion, and feast on truth.

Fast from thoughts that weaken, and feast on promises that inspire.
Fast from problems that overwhelm, and feast on prayer that undergirds.

Fast from unrelenting pressures, and feast on unceasing prayer.
Fast from hostility, and feast on tenderness.

Fast from bitterness, and feast on forgiveness.
Fast from self-concern, and feast on compassion for others.

Fast from worry, and feast on divine order by trusting in God.
Fast from complaining, and feast on appreciation.
Fast from negatives, and feast on affirmatives.



A LITANY FOR THE SEASON OF LENT

L: God of life, of community of reconciliation, of compassion, we come to You today in a spirit, of praise and thanksgiving. We praise You for all of creation: the living earth entrusted to our care, and people of every race, religion and nation.

Allow us to embrace, respect and love all You have given us. *All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.*

L: We thank you, for each breath we take, every colour we see, every moment we make. Strengthen us to be grateful for every minute of our day, every person we meet, and every opportunity You give us. *All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.*

L: We praise You, because all good things have been given to us in love. Help us to know and feel every day, every minute that You love us,

and You trust us, that we are to live in this love. Help us to help others to know your love.

All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.

L: We thank You, for our families, our friends, our country.

Teach us to honour those who have gone before us, to walk with our seniors, to love and protect our children, and to foster compassion in our communities.

All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.

L: Make us ready to come to the aid, of those in danger from violence, addictions, disruptions and discrimination in our homes, in our institutions, on our streets.

All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.



L: Help us to find signs of hope, in times of joy or pain or challenge,

Guide us to use our gifts, of time and talent to restore and affirm all that is good,

heal that which is weak and avoid that which is sinful and destructive in life.

All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.



L: Nourish our spirits, so we will be ready to welcome the stranger, the immigrant, the refugee, the handicapped, the poor, the street person.

Unbind and set free your sons and daughters, to recognize Your One Spirit in one and in all.

All: This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.