

2023-02-24: Consecrate a Fast

Objective

- How to make our fasting useful and beneficial

Key Verse

- "Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly" (Joel 1:14)

Body

What is Fasting

- Enrichment to the soul by means of denouncing the desires of the body
- Without spiritual growth, then it is not fasting; it is just a diet

Why don't we like Fasting?

- We are doing it wrong
- Most of the time, when we are not enjoying something spiritual it is because we are not doing it right!
 - Someone who comes to the Liturgy but is on their phone the whole time, will say liturgy is boring
 - Someone who goes to school but doesn't pay attention to the lectures, will say school is not beneficial

Pitfalls in Fasting

- Extremes
 - **Nominalism:** Get through a fast with the minimum effort possible.
 - We don't want the fasting lifestyle to disrupt our regular lifestyle too much. We simply want to "pay our dues" and do the minimum possible to take communion and be a "part of this community"
 - Jonah fell into this when he didn't want to preach to Nineveh and he finally goes, he walks one day into the city - even though the city is a three day walk across
 - St Paul calls this "having a form of godliness but denying its power." (2 Timothy 3:5)
 - **Pharisaism:** Take fasting too seriously and focus on the minutiae of the rules
 - I am reading all of the ingredients on every box
 - I am researching the factory that produces this food and what else they produce in that factory to make sure there's no cross contamination with

something "fitary"

- **Unrealistic Expectations:** Trying to do what is beyond your spiritual level or abilities
 - "In this fast, I want to read the whole Bible"
 - "In this fast, I will abstain until 6pm every day"
 - "In this fast, I will pray all of the hours of the Agpeya every day"
 - When your expectations for yourself are unrealistic, or past your own spiritual level/ability, you will fail and stop halfway through
- Food Only
 - Fasting without prayer, repentance, spiritual readings, quiet time, participation with the Church, etc. is just a diet
 - If when I fast, the only thing I change is my diet, then I have not fasted

How to Fast

- Avoid Extremes
 - Be moderate in your approach to fasting and avoid the aforementioned extremes
- Start with Food
 - Change your eating and change your life
 - We revolve so much of our life around food - what we will eat, when we will eat, when we will prepare, when we will shop, how much we will spend, etc. In addition, what we eat, how much we eat, and when we eat affects how we feel, how we think, how we act and how we interact.
 - Change what you eat for the sake of following Christ, and our life in Christ will change
 - Food is something that we do every day; it keeps us alive; it makes us feel better
 - Since food is so integral to our body and our life, we can use fasting as a way of bridging our faith and our life
 - Fasting should SIMPLIFY our shopping, our meal planning, our cooking, etc. not complicate it
 - Some tips:
 - Eat less
 - Eat less often
 - Eat simply
 - Don't eat out if you can avoid it
 - Be bored by your menu from time to time
 - Think about food less often
 - Feel, and endure feeling, hunger at some point in your day
 - Spend less on groceries and use what you save for God's glory
 - It's not an effort, it's a fast
- Deny Yourself

- Self-denial is voluntarily choosing not to do things you want to do; saying no to our whims, impulses and preferences; refusing our instant self-gratification
- The Fast is a good opportunity to deny yourself the things that you want to do, for a time:
 - Video Games
 - TV/Movies
 - Social Media
 - TikToks/Shorts/Reels
- Talk Less
 - One of the topics most discussed in the Desert Fathers is Silence
 - "I have often repented for having spoken, but never for having kept silent" - St Arsenius
 - We use our words to impress, to dominate, to manipulate, to curse, to prove we are right, to get our way, etc.
 - We can take advantage of the fasting time to speak less
 - Speaking less = listening more (to God, to your neighbor")
 - Tame the tongue (quality and quantity)
- Cultivate Silence
 - Talking less is related to our exterior silence, but there is also the silence of our environment
 - "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone" - Blaise Pascal
 - We don't like silence! We are surrounded by the noise and loudness of social media, of background music, of devices, etc.
 - It is good to take some time to cultivate silence and to fill our silence with "positive content"
 - Prayer
 - Reading
 - Walking
 - Sitting quietly
- Choose your Weapons
 - Fasting is a form of spiritual warfare. Satan does not want you to fast, and he will fight it with temptations, with relaxation, etc.
 - Choose your weapons for this war - decide what they will be and arm yourself with them
 - Prayer Canon - What will your prayers look like during the fast?
 - Scriptural Canon - What will you read from Scripture during the fast?
 - Spiritual Reading - What else will you read during the fast?
 - Church Activities - What additional church activities will you commit to?
 - Liturgy on Tuesday
 - Bible Study
 - HSB Activities

Application

- Let us have a plan for the Holy and Great Fast

Resources

- <https://service.strebekahorlando.org/books/hsb-jr-sunday-school/page/2023-02-24-spirituality-of-fasting> - Notes from the St George/St Rueiss Curriculum
 - When You Fast: The Why and How of Christian Self-Discipline by L Joseph Letendre
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