

2023-02-24: Spirituality of Fasting

Objective

Key Verse

Body

The Antiquity of Fasting

- Adam
 - Fasting was the first commandment given to Adam from God - "Do not eat from a certain type of tree"
 - God was setting a limit for Adam not to exceed the desires of the flesh and to behave over the level of earthly and materialistic things
 - Adam was defeated by temptation. He gave greater authority to his flesh than to his spirit
 - Conversely, Christ, the Second Adam, began His service with fasting and did not fall into temptation
- Old Testament Prophets Fasted
 - **King David:** Ps 35:13, Ps 69:10
 - **Daniel:** Daniel 3
 - **Ezekiel:** Ezekiel 4:9
 - **Moses:** Exodus 24:18, Deuteronomy 9:18, 25
- Whole Congregations Fasted
 - Nineveh fasted and the Lord accepted their repentance (Jonah 3:5-10)
 - The Jews fasted in the time of Esther and the Lord was with her when she met the King (Esther 4:15-17)
- The Lord Jesus taught about fasting
 - "However, this king does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21)
 - "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Matthew 6:16-18)

- The Apostles Fasted
 - **St Peter:** Acts 10:10
 - **St Paul:** 2 Cor 6:5, 2 Cor 11:27
 - **All the Apostles:** Acts 13:2-3
- The Early Church Fasted
 - Didache (1st Century): "But do not let your fasts be with the hypocrites; for they fast on Monday and Thursday; but you shall fast on Wednesday and Friday" (Chapter 8)
- Fasting Precedes all Feasts
 - Advent Fast and Paramoun before the Nativity
 - Paramoun before the Theophany
 - Lent before Palm Sunday
 - Pascha before Resurrection
- Fasting Precedes all Sacraments
 - Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Unction of the Sick, Priesthood, and Matrimony (in the original rite)
 - The only exception is Repentance in order not to delay repentance
- Fasting Precedes all Service
 - Christ fasted before beginning His ministry
 - Moses fasted before receiving the Tablets of the Covenant
 - St John the Baptist fasted before his ministry
 - The Apostles fasted before their ministry (Acts 13:2-3)
 - A priest who is ordained fasts for 40 days before beginning his ministry
 - A bishop who is ordained fasts for one year

What is Fasting?

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 - Enrichment to the soul by means of denouncing the desires of the body
 - If there is no spiritual growth, then it is not fasting; it is just a diet
- Let's look at the benefits to both body and soul

Fasting and the Body

- Abstaining from Food
 - If we look at the physical part, fasting is not just eating vegan food, but the more important part is the abstaining from food.
 - Having a "no-food period" is the important part
 - The length of the time period is different from one person to another depending on:
 - Degree of spirituality of the person
 - Age of the person
 - Health of the person
 - Type of work and efforts required in it
 - In all cases, there is a minimum level that is coordinated with the Father of Confession
 - Christ - "And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry" (Matthew 4:2)

- St Peter - "Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance" (Acts 10:10)
- St Paul - "I know how to be abased, and I know how to be abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." (Philippians 4:12)
- St Paul - "in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness..." (2 Cor 11:27)
- Fasting reaches its desired level when the person is hungry
- "Devils take great delight in fullness, and drunkenness and bodily comfort. Fasting possesses great power and it works glorious things. To fast is to banquet with angels" - St Athanasius
- Vegan Diet
 - God created man a vegetarian "And God said, 'See I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.'" (Genesis 1:29-30)
 - After Adam forced himself out of paradise, his descendants were given meat to eat after Noah's Ark (Genesis 9:1-3)
 - When God led the people in the wilderness 40 years, he gave them vegetarian food (Manna) and then reluctantly gave them meat to eat (Quail) (Exodus 16:31, Numbers 11:33-34)
 - Vegetarian food was the choice of Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:8-12, 10:3)
 - Ezekiel ate vegetarian food (Ezekiel 4:9)
- You can think of it as - we try to become like spirit, who don't eat food. But when we fall weak, we try to go back to our original nature in the Paradise of the Garden where we eat without meat and dairy.

Fasting and the Soul

- "Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly." (Joel 2:15)
 - Consecrate means to make something special and to dedicate it (i.e. to God)
 - The days of fasting are holy days, dedicated to God and not to the world
- What is the Goal of your Fasting?
- Fasting is to be accompanied by repentance
 - "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?" (Isaiah 58:6)
- Fasting is to be accompanied by more prayers
 - "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21)
 - Living a victorious life over the temptation of the devil, requires fasting accompanied with prayers
- Fasting is to be accompanied by spiritual readings
 - Set with your Father of Confession a plan for your Scriptural Readings
 - Take for yourself a spiritual book to read in addition to the Scripture, or read the lives of the saints
- Fasting is to be accompanied by some alone time

- "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." (Luke 6:12)
- The Lord used to take some alone time
- To grow deeper in our spiritual life, we have to exercise silence around us and be alone
- Turn off the phone, turn off the TV, the social media, the video games, even the social events and hangouts and just take some quiet time
- Fasting is to be accompanied by participating in the church's spiritual activities/programs
 - More liturgies during fasting period
 - Attend the things that you haven't been attending (e.g. Bible Study, Sunday School)
 - Participate in more activities (e.g. like in our HSB class)
- Rejected Types of Fasting
 - The fasting of the Pharisees (Luke 18:9-14)
 - The fasting of the people who said they will neither eat nor drink until they had killed St Paul (Acts 23:12-13)

Why Fast

- We fast to prepare
 - The Church teaches us that fasting is used to prepare for the Sacraments, for the Feasts, and for Ministry (see above)
- We fast to be set free
- We fast to be fruitful

How to Fast

- Avoid 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
- Start with Food
- Deny Yourself
- Talk Less
- Cultivate Silence
- Exercise Your Mind
- Be Purposeful

Application

Contemplation

Resources

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