

2026-02-15: Benefit from the Fast

Introduction

"From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, **in hunger and thirst, in fastings often**, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)

- Fasting is distinguished from hunger and thirst... hunger and thirst is involuntary. It's when he's traveling and has no food, or imprisoned and not given any water. But fasting is voluntary. It's an offering made to the Lord Jesus Christ willingly
- It feels like fasting doesn't belong in this list- why does he include fasting with beatings and shipwrecks?? Because it is a CHOSEN suffering for Christ.

What is Fasting?

- Read "...by bread alone" chapter from Fr Alexander Schmemmann's "Great Lent" book
 - <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/cc1sc6yndf23vf5mr9b3v/Great-Lent-Fr-Alexander-Schmemmann.pdf?rlkey=f3s7tugj87pweekrp7p579w99&dl=0>
- Fasting is not:
 - Symbolic "giving up" of something (esp. Catholic)
 - Obligatory or customary "community practice"
 - Scrupulous observance of dietary regulations
 - Deprivation of the body - not a virtue in itself, but only a means by which the soul can grow
 - Some fast for self-approval to feel pious or gain approval in church
 - Some fast to avoid neglecting the biblical commandment
 - Some fast for self-glory from others' praise
- The Lord Jesus Christ, when He was fasting, was tempted by the devil to turn a stone into bread and eat. He responded with "Man shall not live by bread alone"
 - What does this mean?
 - What does it mean to live "by bread alone"
 - Actually, what does it mean to live? What is life?
- The Lord Jesus Christ is Life
 - "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4)

- "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25)
- "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6)
- "I am the Bread of Life" (John 6:48)
- Food in itself has no life, but only by God does it give life to the body
- Adam was given life
 - "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."
 - Death was not yet introduced into the world; Adam would have lived forever - not because he had life in himself, but because he was with God. Because he depended on God.
- Adam decided instead of depending on God, he could depend on the fruit
 - The devil tempted them telling them they could "be like God" - they could have Life in them.
 - Instead of depending on God, he depended on the bread of the world
 - And death entered into the world - because the bread has no life in itself; and so when we depended on the daily bread and the bread of the world, we depended on something that had no life in it.
 - The biggest lie that Satan told us is that "life can exist apart from communion with God"
- Christ came to repair the damage Adam did
 - Adam **refused the fast**; The Lord Jesus comes and before starting His ministry, **fasts 40 days** without food; and overcomes Satan. He embraces hunger and defeats the lie.
 - "When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He became hungry." (Matthew 4:2)
- Hunger
 - Hunger is the state where we realize that our dependence is on something else
 - It is when we urgently and essentially need food - which shows us that we do NOT have life in ourselves
 - I face the ultimate question: On what does my life depend?
 - Fasting means **to be hungry** - to go to the limits of hunger and discover the whole truth - that man is not hungry for food, he is hungry for life. He is hungry for God. And that is a SPIRITUAL State, not a PHYSICAL state
 - And if the hunger for God is a SPIRITUAL STATE, then it needs a SPIRITUAL effort along with the physical effort
- Prayer
 - Physical fasting is meaningless (and even dangerous) if it's disconnected from the spiritual effort - prayer and concentration on God.
- So what is fasting for a Christian?
 - It is a way to recover our true spiritual nature by being HUNGRY
 - "A drastic reduction of food so that the permanent state of a certain hunger might live as a reminder of God and a constant effort to keep our mind on Him. Everyone who has practiced it knows that this ascetical fast rather than weakening us makes us light, concentrated, sober, joyful, pure." - Fr Alexander Schmemmann (Great Lent)
 - The Christian Fast is the way that the Lord:
 - Makes us free - liberates us from our dependence on food, matter and the world

- Makes us fruitful - fruits of repentance
- Prepares us - for tribulation, for temptation, for communion

How to Fast?

"Four times a year the Church invites us to purify and liberate ourselves from the dominion of the flesh by the holy therapy of fasting, and each time the success of the therapy depends precisely on the application of **certain basic rules**." - Fr Alexander Schmemmann (Great Lent)

The Gospel for the Pre-Fast Sunday talks about: Fasting, Prayer and Almsgiving. These three things ask us to consider our relationship with ourselves (via Fasting), with God (via Prayer) and with others (via Almsgiving).

When I fast, there will be an aspect with myself, with God and with others.

Myself: Food Aspect

- Abstinence
 - To feel hunger - and thus open my eyes to my dependence on God
 - To eat like the angels, the spirits
 - Everyone abstains differently
 - Based on spiritual level
 - Based on age
 - Based on state of health
 - Based on type of work
 - Gradual Progression
 - What to do during the period of abstinence
 - Don't think about food - what you will eat, preparing the meals, etc. Elevate your mind beyond the food and materialism
 - Don't anticipate the end of the abstinence period
 - Let the spirit guide you, not the clock
 - Be hungry! Don't abstain until you feel hungry, but be hungry and then abstain some more. ENDURE HUNGER - every day.
 - "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled." (Luke 6:21)
 - He who hungers becomes aware of his weakness and defeats his self-delusion, self-reliance, self-confidence. When the body is humbled, the soul is humbled. Feeling the need for support, the soul pleads with God.
 - Do not escape from hunger by wasting time, idle talk, sleeping
 - Be wise and NOT extreme in hunger
- Quality
 - What kinds of food? Vegan
 - "I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth," (Daniel 10:3)
 - To eat like Adam and Eve before the fall
 - What kinds of meals? Simple ones
 - Don't eat out if you can avoid it
 - Be bored by your menu from time to time
 - Spend less on groceries and give what you save to the poor

- Fasting should SIMPLIFY shopping, meal planning and cooking, NOT complicate it.
- Quantity
 - How much food?
 - How often? How many meals?
 - How full am I? Half-Hungry, Satisfied, Full

God: Spiritual Discipline Aspect

- "Consecrate a fast,
Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders *And* all the inhabitants of the land *Into* the house of the Lord your God,
And cry out to the Lord." (Joel 1:14)
 - Is the Lord the aim of your fast?
 - Fasting out of love for God
 - Fasting because it brings us closer to God
- Prayers
 - More frequent
 - Maybe longer
- Scripture
 - More time with God's word
 - Less time with phones and scrolling
- Worship
 - Attending liturgies (i.e. a weekday liturgy)
- Readings
- Prostrations
 - Participation of the body
 - "But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection" (1 Cor 9:27)
- Thoughts - the Hidden Fast
 - This is where I often fail in my fast
 - Does God occupy my thoughts while I fast, or worldly concerns?
 - Labor, news, conversations, politics, etc.
 - Liturgy: "Lift up your hearts" - "We have them with the Lord"
 - Same with fasting... "Lift up your hearts."

Others: Mercy and Charity Aspect

- "Blessed are those who have mercy, who give to the poor and fast and pray" - Great Fast Distribution
- Mercy
 - "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)
- Charity
 - Isaiah 58
 - Whole chapter
- Attitude
 - Hangry, irritated, short-tempered
 - True Fasting produces **PATIENCE**

- Hunger reminds me of my own weakness, so I can be merciful to others

The Fruit of Fasting

Fasting is NOT the fruit.

- Humility
- Repentance
- Mercy
- Detachment
 - Dependence on God not on the world or the "bread alone"
- Joy
 - Clarity
 - Lightness
 - Sobriety

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