



FR. DANIEL'S CORNER

FASTING: A MEANS NOT AN END

Fasting, one of the three pillars that punctuates the Lenten season, stands out. Unarguably, Lent is ALSO an ACCCEPTABLE TIME for deeper spiritual growth in Prayer and Practical Charity (Almsgiving) through which the Church prepares her children both for annual Easter and eternal Easter in heaven. As common practice, many of us have lists of what to fast from, and interestingly some of these lists are things to avoid. May God help us stick to them. AMEN. Sometimes we may temporarily give up some sins, which we go back to after Lent, in the sense that while Jesus will be resurrecting, we will be going back to the grave to continue from where we originally were before Easter. If this is the case, should we consider our fasting a holy and worthy one?

The first reading of Ash Wednesday's Office of the Readings (Liturgy of the Hour), which is also the reading Friday after Ash Wednesday, reminds us of the kind of fasting that pleases God (Isaiah 58:1-12). Isaiah pointed out how fasting can backfire. It is not only limited to a personal internal sacrifice. Fasting should not be confined to self. The Lord says: "The kind of fast that pleases me is sharing your food with the hungry and sheltering the poor and homeless. Releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own." In other words, fasting is not only breaking what we usually do in order to discipline ourselves (internal), but also breaking injustices, oppressions, murders, poverty, immoralities, and other situations of sin around us (external).

Fasting is not merely a deprivation from food or other pleasurable things, it is a spiritual exercise that involves our whole being. If while fasting, we are engaged in quarrelling, fighting, or acts of wickedness, Isaiah says these things will prevent our fasting from reaching heaven. If you must fast, let not your hunger become an occasion for anger, fighting or bitterness. It is better to eat well and control your temper than to allow your hunger to push you into sin.

Lent indeed is a penitential time that calls to repent and believe in the Gospel, it nonetheless invites us to put into practice what we confess with our mouths; that is to confess them with our lives. So, when you fast without practical charity, it means that fasting becomes an end rather than a means to living life of charity, faith and hope. However, fasting should be able to give life to another person- help the poor, the sick, the rejected etc. Our fasting should prepare us to love others more closely. In this school of Lent, therefore, the pedagogy of Christian discipleship should be distinctly stated: IF MY FASTING DOES NOT HELP OTHERS, THEN I HAVE MISSED THE MARK. As we go about giving up chocolates, food and drinks, social media, etc., (very good to do them), do not lose sight of the SPIRIT OF FASTING (Epikēia).

True fasting is helping your neighbor! Yes, in the same prophecy of Isaiah quoted above, God rebukes the false religiosity of the hypocrites who fast, while at the same time carrying out their own pursuits, oppressing their workers, "striking with wicked claw": on the one hand, doing penance, while on the other being unjust, making "dirty deals." The Lord calls us, instead, to a true fast, where we are attentive to our neighbor.

The Lenten Prefaces give us the fruits of abstinence/fasting, thus: "For you will that our self-denial should give you thanks, humble our sinful pride, contribute to the feeding of the poor, and so help us imitate you in your kindness (cf. Preface III of Lent). For through bodily fasting you restrain our faults, raise up our minds, and bestow both virtue and its rewards (cf. preface IV of Lent)."