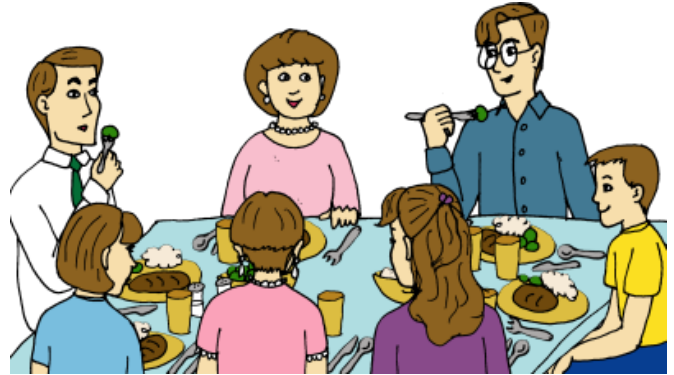


Pylypiwka - The Pre Christmas Fast Week #2

A Journey of Expectation, Preparation and Fulfilment

Food..... It's all around us!

If we look at the Scriptures, from the beginning to the end, we see food and eating in many places. The pages are filled with accounts of meals and banquets and wedding feasts and suppers. Many of Jesus' parables are set in the context of a meal. Likewise, many of his encounters with those who would become his followers take place at meals.



Meals are times when we gather with friends and loved ones to share not only food, but to share the stories of our lives. There is something social about meals. Sharing a meal acquires a very sacred character in the Scriptures and our lives. It forms a bond of community. It is a way of creating and developing intimacy. When we want to celebrate a special event, it usually involves a meal. We'd normally prepare a special menu, and set the table with flowers and candles, or go out to a favourite restaurant.

In Scriptures, meals represent a fullness, the end of a period of waiting or a time of anticipation. The disciples of John the Baptist fasted as a sign of waiting, a sign of preparation. Why are we called to fast? Why are we called to abstain? As baptized people we do not live in a vacuum. We are a part of the living and breathing Tradition of the Church. We need to be rooted in the living continuity of the presence of Christ, as we find written in the Scriptures – we need to be a part of that.

We are created as a composite of body and spirit. These cannot be separated. The spirit does not act without the body, or the body without the spirit. Fasting serves as a discipline for the body, to humble us before God. To voluntarily deprive oneself of food is to turn towards the Lord in an act of total dependence and complete abandonment. It is a way of opening ourselves to God and letting go of our personal agendas. When do we do this? Here are a few examples of when the people of God fasted.

- Before undertaking a difficult task (cf. Est 4:16)
- To ask forgiveness for a wrongdoing (1 Kgs 21-27)
- In time of grief (2 Sm)
- To obtain the end of a calamity (Jl 2:12-17)
- To be open to the divine light (Dn 10:3)

- To await divine grace (Acts 13:2)
- To prepare for an encounter with the Lord (Ex 34:28)

In each of these the meaning of fasting is to stand before God in faith, with an attitude of humility, to welcome the mighty deeds of God.

The practice of fasting can also incur certain risks. We can go through the motions, keeping all the laws and customs and traditions, but if there is no change of heart, it is a fast not pleasing to God.

There is always the risk of pride, that is, fasting for the sake that others will notice. In order for it to be a good fast, it must be done with the love of neighbour and the search for true justice. Fasting must bring us to a change of heart and a change in the way we deal with those around us, especially the needy and the downtrodden.

Our fast must be known only to God. It will then be a pure expression of trust in Him, a humble fasting that opens our heart to an inner justice, a true work of the Father who sees and acts in secret.

When we fast we experience our alienation from God, our expulsion from Paradise and the breakdown of our communion with God. We were created to be in communion with God. Adam and Eve, by their act of disobedience, broke this communion. We are each Adam; we are Eve. In our personal sinfulness, we experience this same brokenness and the separation that our first parents felt.

In His incarnation Jesus overcame this separation. There are three things that separate us from God: God is divine and we are human; God is sinless and we are sinful; God is immortal and we are mortal. By becoming human, Christ overcame the divine-human separation in His own body. Through death on the cross, he took upon himself our sinfulness, and our sinfulness was thus put to death on the cross. And by His resurrection, he overcame the bounds of mortality.

We now live in a paradox. We are both united and separated from God at the same time. We are created to be in union with Him, yet are separated by sin and reunited with God through Christ. All three are elements of our lives.

When we fast we re-experience our human situation. We were created for glory, but we live in exile. Adam and Eve were given all of Paradise to enjoy, but broke the only rule God gave them to follow. They were to fast from eating of the tree in the center of the Garden of Eden. They broke the fast and lost Paradise. We return to Paradise by doing what Adam and Eve did not do. We return to Paradise by fasting!

When we fast, we become hungry. We sense our own weakness and dependence. We see how needy we really are. The myth of our self-made person is shattered. Then we ask ourselves: "Upon whom can I depend?" We realize that our true longing is for the Lord. Then we begin to realize that everything is truly a gift. Everything comes from God. This realization

leads us to a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness to God. We see creation once again as something good and given to us by God. We do not take anything for granted!

Fasting deepens our sense of hope, our expectation of the Lord. In the Pre Christmas season much of the world is preparing and waiting. Fasting in the midst of the season of preparation and anticipation heightens our expectation of the Lord in our lives. Certainly the Lord is already with us and is with us at all times. He does not leave us, nor does He hide from us. Often we are caught up in our own worlds of cares and concerns, forgetting to trust in Him and turn everything over to Him. Fasting breaks us out of our cocoon of self centeredness.

Fasting also hurts! It stirs in us a deep sense of repentance and compunction. Fasting stirs up a desire and willingness to turn around. It controls our desires and takes the edge off our compulsions to have our needs fulfilled and satisfied immediately.

Finally, fasting strengthens our prayer and intensifies our intercession. Prayer, in conjunction with fasting, becomes a deeply spiritual hungering for the Lord, depending on the Lord, trusting in Him and opening ourselves completely to Him. Fasting purifies our prayer by driving out whatever is not of God.



Adapted from [Christ is Born: A Journey of Expectation, Preparation, and Fulfillment](#); Office of Religious Education, Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, 2005: **pages 17-33**

[family eating lunch](#)

Sources:

[Christ is Born: A Journey of Expectation, Preparation, and Fulfillment](#); Office of Religious Education, Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, 2005
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