

# FASTING!

The Why and Benefits of Fasting in  
Relation to our Spiritual Life  
and our Awareness of God

requirement in the approved rule (d. 1223), instead allowed for those to whom the Spirit called to engage this penitential practice.

## FRANCIS & FASTING



- By Francis' time, it seems as though fasting was primarily a pious practice for Lent and for each Friday of the year. The weekly fasting was a way of reminding **PEOPLE** to guard against gluttony and impure thoughts, deeds, and words. While it retained the penitential focus, it was not always clear that it retained its covenantal connection to the poor and outcast.

## Rule of Life

- The Rule of Life for the friars also directed fasting requirements. The Early Rule §3 (d. 1221) directed that the Friars should fast from All Saints Day until Christmas, from Epiphany until Easter, and on all Fridays of the year. The "Epiphany to Easter" was later relaxed as a requirement in the approved rule (d. 1223), instead allowed for those to whom the Spirit called to engage this penitential practice.

## BY EXAMPLE

- "Francis assumed that his followers would learn by imitation." (Thompson, 40) What did the new brothers see? The early biographers are clear that Francis followed the prescribed fasts indicated by the Church. Additionally, in times when he retreated to the wild places for times of prayer, he would also practice the discipline of fasting. He fasted at the onset of missionary endeavors, such as his departure for the Middle East and before crossing the battle lines of Damietta to visit the Sultan of Egypt, Al-Malik al-Kamil.

## MERCY & COMPASSION

- He famously broke the Advent fast to prepare a meal for his local community when one of the brothers found the fast too severe for his abilities. Francis and all the brothers participated in the feast, putting fraternity as a higher value on that day. Thomas of Celano records that Francis told the brothers not to flatter themselves for their fasting regimes since the sinners and unbelievers could also do those things. What was key was the interior attitude that accompanied the exterior fast especially as it turned the brothers to reach out to the poor (3rd Celano).

## Preparation for Fasting

- PRAY AND ASK FOR MARY'S HELP..
- SAY TO YOURSELF, 'TODAY I AM FASTING FOR GOD!'
- PREPARE THE PROPER FOODS TO EAT – BREAD, SOUP, ETC.
- GET RID OF JUNK FOOD IN THE HOUSE!
- CAN YOU THINK OF ANY OTHER WAYS TO PREPARE?????

## Fruits of Fasting

- ▣ *Growth in Obedience to the Word of God (Matthew Ch. 6 & 9) Obedience, along w/prayer and fasting builds confident trust in God.*
- ▣ *Spiritual Awareness of our dependency to come Closer to God*
- ▣ *Purification of the Soul (Our excessive indulgence in worldly pleasures increases in disregard of spiritual matters, irreverent frivolity and forgetfulness of our deeper aspiration; HEAVEN)*
- ▣ *Grow in the Wisdom of God*
- ▣ *Spiritual Nourishment (Only God can remove the veil to allow us to see what is clear to the enlightened soul.)*

## MORE FRUITS

- ▣ *Decreases the desire of the flesh*
- ▣ *Fasting melts our pride and self-confidence (shows our dependence on God; reminds us of our mortality) Man does not live by bread alone....*
- ▣ *Rids us of ingrained habits (Among the acts of worship which God accepts, fasting is perhaps the most difficult to perform on a regular basis. It is difficult because it requires the body to forgo one of its most basic sources of pleasure, eating.)*
- ▣ *Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.*

- ▣ *Fasting backs up our prayer w/action. It is even more powerful if we offer it in combination with the holy merits of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, along with the merits of the Holy Family and all the saints!*
- ▣ *Benefits of Fasting. In fact, one of the many benefits of fasting is that it strengthens the will, conditioning it for future frays against shortsightedness and weak resolve.*

- ▣ *Charity is the mirror image of fasting. When you fast, you prevent physical and mental intrusions from blotting your spirit. When you give, you cast off excess impurities congesting your soul. One cannot be sincerely charitable while being a sensuous glutton. We reveal our gluttony and sensuality in hoarding and greed, both of which separate us from the Creator. Charity requires that we share the superfluous, and fasting facilitates the process. In both situations, excessive burdens on the spirit are being discarded.*

## COMBINES SPIRITUAL AND CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

- ▣ *Fasting atones for sin and makes reparation through charity and love of neighbor.*
- ▣ *Can help release the souls in purgatory!*
- ▣ *Brings about interior conversion!*
- ▣ *WHAT IT HAS GIVEN ME! A Clearer enlightenment on God's will in my own Life.*

## WAYS TO FAST

- ▣ *Fast from Food*
- ▣ *From TV*
- ▣ *Wait 10 minutes before drinking a glass of water, putting salt on a potato, using pepper*
- ▣ *Fast your tongue from gossiping, criticizing, being judgmental of others!*

## More Ways to Fast

- ▣ *Fast from your self-will; always doing things your way; thinking you know more than God!*
- ▣ *(There is only one God. Stop applying for His position!)*
- ▣ *Fast from buying something you really want.*
- ▣ *Fast from getting angry or showing impatience or complaining.*
- ▣ *Fast from procrastinating... start changing bad habits..*

## The Acceptable Fast

- ▣ The "acceptable fast" is discussed in the biblical Book of Isaiah, chapter 58:6-7. In this chapter, the nation of Israel is rebuked for their fasting, and given this exhortation:
- ▣ (verse 6) "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"
- (7) Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

- ▣ This passage indicates that the acceptable fast is not merely abstinence from food or water, but a decision to fully obey God's commands to care for the poor and oppressed. Zechariah, chapter 7:5-10, also repeats this message. The opening chapter of the Book of Daniel, vv. 8-16, describes a partial Daniel Fast and its effects on the health of its observers.

## REWARDS FOR FASTING PROPERLY

- ▣ (verse 8) "Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
- (9) Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I." (Isaiah 58:8-9)

## Jesus' Words to His Disciples

- ▣ *"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you." (Matthew 6:16-18)*

## Great Saints who Fasted

- ▣ St. Peter Chrysologus, bishop, wrote that prayer, fasting, and mercy are inseparable. In a sermon entitled, **Prayer Knocks, Fasting Obtains, and Mercy Receives**, he says,
- ▣ *"There are three things by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting, and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy, and fasting; these three are one, and they give life to each other."*
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▣ *“Fasting is the soul of prayer; mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them; they cannot be separated. If you have only one of them or not all together, you have nothing. So if you pray fast, if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others, you open God’s ear to yourself.”*