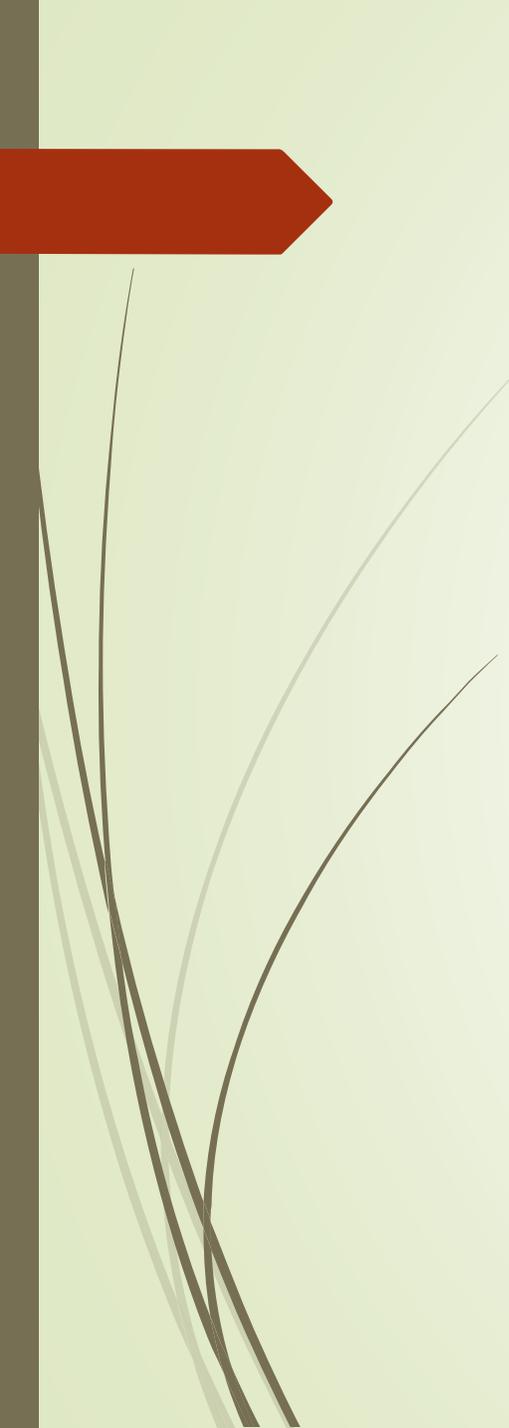


# Rediscovering the Gift of Fasting



***Hungering for God***



“Denying material food, which nourishes our body, nurtures an interior disposition to listen to Christ and be fed by His saving word. Through fasting and praying, we allow Him to come and **satisfy the deepest hunger** that we experience in the depths of our being: the hunger and thirst for God.”

--Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI in  
2009 Lenten message



# Fasting in the Early Church

- Christians fasted every Wednesday and Friday.
- Wednesday was a day of penance; the day that Judas betrayed Jesus
- Friday - the Lord's crucifixion and death.



# Fasting is in the Bible

- 77 times in the Old and New Testament
- Genesis 2:16-17 God says “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”
- St. Basil: ‘You shall not eat’ (law of fast and abstinence)

# Old Testament

- ▶ Samuel, Judges, 1 Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, Maccabees, Psalms, Sirach, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Daniel, Joel, Jonah, Zechariah
- ▶ Only one fast was specifically commanded - on the Day of Atonement – Leviticus 16:29-31

“This will be a perpetual law for you. 'On the tenth day of the seventh month you will **fast** and refrain from work, both citizen and resident alien...to purify you before Yahweh from all your sins. It will be a sabbatical rest for you and you will **fast**. This is a perpetual law.”

# New Testament

- Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, 2 Corinthians
- Jesus' example: "He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights" (Mt 4:2).
- Jesus gives us instructions for when, **not if**, we fast (Mt 6:16-17):

*"When you are fasting, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do. But when you **fast**, put scent on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you."*

# Reasons for Fasting in the Bible

## When they wanted God to hear their prayers

- “For some days I mourned, **fasting and praying** before the God of heaven.” (Nehemiah 1:4)
- Daniel pleaded with God: “I turned my face to the Lord God begging for time to pray and to plead, with **fasting**, sackcloth and ashes.” (Daniel 9:3)
- Anna, the prophetess “never left the temple, but worshipped night and day with fasting and prayer.” (Luke 2:37)



# Reasons

- When faced with impending danger

“Then all the Israelites and the whole people went off to Bethel; they wept and sat in Yahweh's presence; they **fasted** all day till the evening and presented burnt offerings and communion sacrifices before Yahweh.” (Judges 20-26)

# Reasons for Fasting in the Bible

## ➤ When loved ones were sick

“David pleaded with Yahweh for the child; he kept a strict **fast** and went home and spent the night lying on the ground, covered with sacking.” (2 Samuel 12:16)

## ➤ When seeking God's Will

“They appointed presbyters for them in each church, and with **prayer and fasting**, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith.” (Acts 14:23)



# Reasons

## When seeking God's forgiveness

“And the people of Nineveh believed in God; they proclaimed a **fast** and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least. God saw their efforts to renounce their evil ways. And God relented about the disaster which he had threatened to bring on them, and did not bring it.” (Jonah 3:5,10)



# The Power to Cast out Demons

Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why couldn't we drive it out?' He replied, 'This kind can come out only by **prayer and fasting.**'

Mark 9:27-29



# Fasting of the Saints

- St. Benedict, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Faustina included fasting in their rules of life; Wed, Friday, and Sat (in preparation for Sunday).
- St. Thomas Aquinas said, “Fasting is the guardian of chastity.”
- “Fasting purifies the soul. It lifts up the mind, and it brings the body into subjection to the spirit.” St. Augustine



# Saints and Church Fathers

- “We fast for three purposes: (1) to restrain the desires of the flesh; (2) to raise the mind to heights of contemplation things; (3) to make satisfaction for our sins.” St. Thomas Aquinas
- Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. If you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others.” St. Peter Chrysologus



# Saints and Church Fathers

- “The prayer of fasting is **pleasing to** God and frightful to Satan. It contributes to the salvation of others as well as to our own. There is nothing more efficacious than fasting in order to come closer to God.” St. Leo the Great
- “The scripture is full of places that prove fasting to be not the invention of man but **the institution of God**, and to have many more profits than one.” St. Thomas More



# Reasons from Christian Tradition

1. From the beginning, God commanded fasting and sin entered into the world because Adam and Eve broke the fast. *Origen believed that to fast at Lent undoes the failure of Adam and Eve.*
2. Fasting is ultimately about fasting from sin.
3. Reveals our dependence on God and not the resources of this world.
4. An ancient way of preparing for the Eucharist—the truest of foods.



# Seven Reasons for Fasting

5. Fasting is preparation for baptism (and all the sacraments)—for the reception of grace.
6. A means of saving resources to give to the poor.
7. Fasting is a means of self-discipline, chastity, and the restraining of the appetites.



THE PRINCIPLE  
OF FASTING  
MEANS GIVING UP  
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*Tony Evans*  
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*Tony Evans*



# The Eucharistic Fast

- Worthily receiving Christ in the Eucharist, as preparing for the eternal feast in Heaven.
- True differentiation between ordinary bread and the Eucharistic Bread.
- Prior to 1953, Catholic rule stated that not even water could be taken from midnight until receiving Communion.



# Eucharistic Fast

- Pope Pius XII made liturgical changes that permitted Holy Mass in the afternoon; Eucharistic fasting was reduced to 3 hours.
- Second Vatican Council reduced the time to one hour.
- Canon 919: “One who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain from any food or drink, with the exception only of water and medicine, for at least the period of one hour before Holy Communion.”

# Fasting in Today's Church

## Code of Canon Law

Can. 1249 **The divine law binds all the Christian faithful to do penance each in his or her own way.** In order **for all to be united** among themselves by some **common observance** of penance, however, penitential days are prescribed on which the Christian faithful devote themselves in a special way to prayer, perform works of piety and charity, and deny themselves by fulfilling their own obligations more faithfully and especially by observing **fast and abstinence, according to the norms.**

# Code of Canon Law - Fasting

- ▶ **Can. 1250** The penitential days and times in the universal Church are **every Friday of the whole year** and the season of Lent.
- ▶ **Can. 1251 Abstinence from meat**, or from some other food, is to be observed **on all Fridays**, unless a solemnity should fall on a Friday. **Abstinence and fasting** are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

# Canon Law

- **Can. 1252** The law of abstinence binds those who have completed their fourteenth year... until the beginning of their sixtieth year. Pastors of souls and parents are to ensure that even those who by reason of their age are not bound by the law of fasting and abstinence, are taught the true meaning of penance.
- **Can. 1253** The conference of bishops can determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence as well as substitute other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety, in whole or in part, for abstinence and fast.



# Vatican dispensation – Canon 1250

- U.S. Bishops given a dispensation to make
  - Fridays outside of Lent – all penitential
  - Permission for Catholics in the U.S. to substitute a penitential or charitable practice of their own choosing - **mandatory**
  - During Lent abstinence from meat on Fridays is obligatory in the U.S. as elsewhere

# Pastoral Statement - Fridays

## Christ Died for Our Salvation on Friday

- Catholics have always set apart **Friday for special penitential observance**
- **Meat** was once an exceptional form of food - now commonplace, and may not actually serve as penance.
- U.S. Catholic Bishops urge all to **prepare for that weekly Easter** that comes with **each Sunday** by freely making every Friday a day of self-denial and mortification in prayerful remembrance of the passion of Jesus Christ.



# Apostolic Constitution on Fast and Abstinence

- Many Catholics were brought up to believe that Church laws regarding fast and abstinence were serious obligations – *infractio* was a mortal sin
- Pope Paul VI issued the *Constitution* at the end of the Second Vatican Council
- Ancient traditions of fasting and abstinence seen as legalistic and negative.
- Deeds of charity and other virtuous acts seen as good preparation for Easter.

# Friday Observance

- “We emphasize that our people are henceforth **free from the** obligation traditionally binding under **pain of sin in what pertains to Friday abstinence, except for Lent.**
- Rather, let it be proved by the spirit that these present decisions and recommendations of this conference of bishops **will herald a new birth of loving faith and more profound penitential conversion,** by both of which we become one with Christ, mature sons of God, and servants of God's people.”



# Changing our mindset about eating

- Eating should be a religious act that celebrates ties to God, the earth, and one another.
  - Gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins. Eating to excess and desiring to do so is sinful in a world of famine and starvation.
  - Fasting shows solidarity with the poor.
- 



# Changing the mindset

- Eating – not just a refueling exercise
- Time spent on food – planning meals, shopping for food, preparing it, eating it, and cleaning up afterwards. Could this time be better spent with God?



# How to Fast

- Start slowly – as in exercise, “Fasting is a journey” (Live the Fast).
- Prayer and calling on the Holy Spirit
- A specific prayer intention
- There will be a moment in the day when you want to give up
- Drink plenty of water



# Why Bread and Water?

- Bread is associated with the Bread of Life – the *Holy Eucharist*
  - Water is for the purification and cleansing of our soul
- 



# LIVE the FAST

- The Live the Fast Starter Kit is designed for anyone beginning their bread and water fasting journey.
- A portion of every Fasting Kit purchase goes to *Mary's Meals*.
- The Starter Kit includes:
  - 36 multigrain rolls
  - "Live the Fast guide to a bread & water fast"
  - A fasting prayer card
  - A Magnificat prayer card
  - A bread instructions magnet
  - A Live the Fast bookmark



# Can't Fast – Medical Reasons?

- Other ways to fast
- Create room in your hearts and souls for God, in the same manner as fasting
  - Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
  - Daily rosary
  - Praying without ceasing



# Why Fast?

- When we empty ourselves, we can be in closer communion with God.
- Teaches us the difference between wanting and needing.
- Reminds us that food is a physical necessity rather than a luxury and pleasure of the flesh, which can easily lead to over indulgence



# Why Fast?

- Reminds us of the poor who go without food
  - Practice and discipline teaches us to move away from things of the world and draw closer to God
  - On days of fasting, we are reminded of God throughout the entire day.
- 



# Three Pillars of Lenten Practice

“Prayer with fasting and alms with uprightness are better than riches with iniquity.” (Tb 12:8)

- Fasting – conversion directed to ourselves
- Prayer – conversion focuses us on God
- Almsgiving – conversion is expressed in concern for our neighbor



**Prayer carries us half way  
to God, fasting brings us  
to the door of His palace,  
and alms-giving procures  
us admission.**

QUOTEHD.COM

quran

QUOTEHD.COM

quran



*“Do you wish your prayers to reach God?  
Give it two wings, fasting and almsgiving.”*

St. Augustine

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One Meal One Day -

One Meal One Day allows you to skip a meal and donate the money you would have spent on that meal so that a child in extreme poverty can get the nutritional support she desperately needs.



# Fasting During Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/lent/lent-videos.cfm>



# Fasting Prayer

Father, today I resolve to fast. I choose to fast because your prophets fasted, because our Son, Jesus Christ, fasted, as did His apostles and disciples. I decide to fast because your servant, Mother Mary also fasted. I fast today as a disciple of your Son and I ask for the intercession of the saints and my guardian angel.

Father, I present this day of fasting to you for the ability to discover your Word more and discover what is essential and non-essential in this life. I present this fast to you for Peace —for peace in my heart, peace with my family, peace with my neighbors, peace in my town/city, state and my country.



I fast for peace in the world, for all troubled spots in the world.

I remember those who are hungry and impoverished.

I fast today for (your intentions).

Through this fast cleanse me of all bad habits and calm down my passions and let your virtues increase in me. Let the depth of my soul open to your grace through this fast, so that it may totally affect and cleanse me.

Father, please help me fast with my heart. Mary, you were free in your heart and bound to nothing except the Father's will. Please obtain by prayer the grace of a joyful fast for me today.

Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory Be. Amen



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