

## **FASTING AND CONVERSION OF HEART**

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“Repent and believe in the Gospel” was the first called of Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry. Faith in Him and in His words, requires repentance, transformation of our hearts and minds.



The message of repentance and conversion is always directed first to the conversion our hearts: *“Rend your hearts and not your garments,”* the prophet Joel says to us (Joel 2:12-18). This is the passage of Scriptures that we hear in the first reading of Ash Wednesday, Joel is giving us the clear direction that must guide our sacrifices, penances and ascetical practices:

the true meaning of them is to obtain a change, a conversion of heart that will lead us to become more identified with the sentiments of Christ’s Heart. He is not calling us to forget about the external sacrifices but to do them with the right intention to obtain the true fruit which is conversion: a new heart. Rend your hearts, means, let them be pierced by the words of Jesus, let them be contradicted in their worldly values by the values of the Kingdom, let them be turned around by the true meaning of love, let them be pierced by the power of the Sacrifice of Our Lord, by his example of what it means to have a Heart like His. Let them be pierced by His suffering and passion, as to understand that He truly loved us to the extreme and as he said to the disciples when he was watching their feet, *“I have given you an example that you should do just as I have done for you”*.

**Jesus was calling the disciples to a life that required the death to all that impeded the transformation of their hearts...** *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24).* *Jesus was calling them to conversion and to an ascetical life, that did not attend* primarily to exterior acts like fasting, prayer, sacrifices, and mortifications, but included them, with the purpose of changing their self-seeking or selfish hearts into hearts of authentic love, ruled by the values of the Kingdom. He was directing them to live in the spirit of self-donation that automatically includes many sacrifices to lead them to conversion of heart, to inner transformation, to a renewal of the mind and way of thinking, to forgetting the old self and becoming a new creature. If this is not the purpose, there is some fruit from our penances and sacrifices, but the true fruit is not given in fullness. Actually, **when we desire interior conversion, this inspires one to the expression of this attitude by means of visible signs, gestures and works of penance and ascetism, as fasting, denial of anything that we are attached to.” (Catechism 1430)**

### **LENT: TIME OF CONVERSION AND FREEDOM**

In Lent, particularly, we are called to introduced in a deeper manner the ascetical life, that includes fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, generosity to the needs of others, all with the *purpose of experiencing conversion, of working deeply in areas of our lives that need healing, restoration, purification, detachment or maturation and self-discipline in the Christian life.* Therefore, even though it may sound to some as a negative aspect of the Christian life, it is truly good news... the gospel is the good news for us to become new persons, true children of the Father in the image of His Son. So, ascetical life is a joy to our souls and the way to freedom and to authentic Christian and human maturity.

### **There is a difference between penance and ascetical life, which should be part of our spiritual journey.**

*Penance looks to the past with sorrow for our sins committed* and gives an expression to penitential practices in those areas as a way of atonement or reparation. If I have offended or gossiped about someone, a penitential act, will be to ask forgiveness to that person and to choose to speak good things about that person.

*Ascetism looks to the future,* applying practices of mortification, denial and sacrifices that would help us avoid the occasions of sin, or to purified sinful inclinations as to grow in **Christian holiness and virtue.**

Both are necessary in our journey to grow in identification with Christ and to live a coherent evangelical life.

The term “asceticism” comes from the Greek word *“askesis,”* which signifies *the exercise or training of athletes in preparation for their participation in the athletic games.* Obviously, the training of athletes demands various kinds of restrictions and self-denial, but it is always for the purpose of competing in order to win. This is the way St. Paul applies the concept of asceticism to the Christian life. *“You know that while all the runners in the*

*stadium take part in the race, the award goes to one man. In that case, run so as to win! Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things. They do this to win a perishable crown, but we a crown that is imperishable. I do not run like a man who loses sight of the finish line. I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. What I do is discipline my own body and master it, for fear that after having preached to others I myself should be disqualified." (1 Cor. 9:24-27)*

I deeply ponder in these words of St. Paul: self-discipline which is fruit of self-denial, fasting, sacrifices and mortifications, have the power to give us spiritual authority to master our inclinations, lower passions, bad sentiments, or inappropriate behavior. The foundation to live this self-discipline must be based on the basic human virtues of temperance (moderation), fortitude (strength of character), justice (to always do what is right) and prudence (the wisdom to apply practically the Word of God in every situation of our lives); These four virtues build our interior life and give us the power to master our irregular movements and lower passions, deliver us from self-centered love as to live as true disciples of Christ.

Ascetism delivers us from self-centeredness, selfishness, excessive desire for comfort, and builds our character for sacrifice, fortitude in suffering, postponing ourselves, freedom, self-donation and disposes us for love, oblation love for God and others. The saints are an example of this. I was just thinking of a recent saint, St. Joseito del Rio, for those who saw the movie "For Greater Glory", this young boy since he was a child used to offer sacrifices for others. When the Cristiada began, he joined the Christians that were defending the Church and he was captured and tortured... at his own tomb in front of his mother he said: "It has never has been easy to gain heaven, mom. Viva Cristo Rey!!" Only if we have trained ourselves for sacrifice, we will be faithful and courageous in difficult moments. Therefore, penance and ascetical practices are needed to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh as promise in Ezekiel. The goal of ascetical life, fasting, mortification, denials, sacrifices... is one: the conversion of heart.

### **CONVERSION OF HEART: A NEW HEART**

In the Old Testament there are many prophecies in reference to the future Redemption and it would consist first of all, on the conversion, the change of heart. Jeremiah and Ezekiel repeatedly prophesied about this topic. **Ez 36:26-27:** *"I will sprinkle clean water over you to make you clean; from all your impurities and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from you and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you so that you walk in my statutes, observe my precepts, and keep them; you will be my people, and I will be your God. "* (Ez 36:23-27)

*Jeremiah says, "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts." (Jer 31:33)*

This law which is the law of love, revealed to us in Jesus' Heart, would be interiorly written in our hearts and it would be capable of transforming our hearts in such a way that it would affect all of its sanctifying efficacy in bringing about a profound interior conversion. Contemplating the truth about God's love manifested in the Incarnation, so visible through Jesus' life and messianic mission and climbing to the heights of love to the extreme, manifested in the last supper, Eucharist, Gethsemane, choosing to do the will of the Father to save us, to the Passion, and all that it contained, to the way of the Cross and Crucifixion, how can we not be moved by such love? If His loving sacrifice, sufferings, denials, physical cruelty, thirst, hunger, cold, weight of the Cross, the excruciating pains of the Cross, do not inspire us to be more sacrificial to receive the power of his Blood to transform us and change our hearts, what would do so? Only love can call us to love! Only that kind of love, totally given, totally offered, freely donated.... can call us to any sacrifice for our hearts to learn to love in this way.

The Lord revealed His Heart throughout his whole life on earth and continues to reveal it. He showed us his true sentiments, his sufferings and joys, his loneliness, his thirst for the love of the human heart, he allowed His Heart to be pierced, to be opened as to become the gate to heaven for us. He showed us what he desires, what causes Him pain, what He offers to his disciple, and how much He loves us. He showed us his priorities, his way of seeing what is first in the Kingdom of God, how to forgive, how to seek the smallest and simple way of life; He showed us what moved his decisions, actions, sentiments and how he, who never exempted himself

of any suffering, went through the streets of Galilee, Samaria, Sidon, Jerusalem... doing good to many, alleviating pains of body and soul. His internal disposition was love for the Father and humanity.... That is why he proclaimed to the disciples, "My food is to do the will of the Father". His tenderness and compassion for the people, for those who came to seek his saving or healing power.... those who waited for him, He fed. His heart shows us that he is the Good Shepherd that gives his life for his sheep.

In Lent, we must contemplate His Heart, to allow all our ascetical practices to lead us to be more identified more with the sentiments, dispositions, actions and way of life of Christ's Heart. This transformation of our hearts, having new hearts not of stone, where the seed cannot grow, where love cannot penetrate, but a heart of flesh, a heart truly humanized by God's love and truth, requires much prayer, fasting, penance, mortification and generosity. The prayer of **Psalm 51** summarizes the desire that we must have in Lent and the fruits of all the ascetical practices, penances, works of mercy...

12A **clean heart** create for me, God; renew within me a **steadfast spirit**

13 Do not drive me from before your face, nor take from me **your holy spirit**.

14 **Restore to me the gladness of your salvation**; uphold me with a **willing spirit**.

15 I will teach the wicked your ways, that **sinner may return to you**.

That is why the Church teaches us that there are three traditional expressions of penance. These are **fasting, prayer and almsgiving**. These three are mentioned by Jesus in the Gospel of St. Matthew 6:1-6 and 16-18; precisely in the Gospel of Ash Wednesday. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving remind us that conversion includes all of the aspects of our life: **"they express conversion in relation to ourselves, to God and to others."** (CCC 1434)

In this conference I want to dedicate myself specifically to fasting, which is so necessary in order to grow in self-control, in moderation of our appetites, great power in the spiritual battles we face and in opening our discernment to the spiritual realities and to eternal nourishment.

### **WHAT IS FASTING?**

It is the practice of limiting the amount of food and water we receive in order to imitate the sufferings of Christ during His Passion and throughout His earthly life. Fasting reminds us that conversion affects, and ought to affect, all areas of our lives, since we are body and soul. Fasting is one of the spiritual disciplines the Lord has established to achieve a breakthrough in our lives and in the lives of others. Before we attempt to do something important for the Lord, for our families, for the works of God, and we want his will to be released and protection from the enemy, we should fast.

### **FASTING AS A PART OF THE JEWISH TRADITION**

**Leviticus 16: 29-30**... The Lord orders a day of **fasting as expiation and purification**: ("you will fast... for in that day there will be expiation done you in order to purify you.")

**Joel 2:12**... as a **sign of repentance**: ("turn to me with your whole heart, with fasting, with tears and with laments.")

**Exodus 34:28**... as a **preparation for the manifestations which are to come**, **Moses spends 40 days and 40 nights** on Mount Sinai without eating bread or drinking water and after this wrote the new Tablets of the Law

**Deuteronomy 10:10**... **intercessory power** ("I remained on the Mountain as the first time, for 40 days and 40 nights, in fasting. This time Yahweh listened to me and turned away from destroy you.")

**Jonah 3:7**... in the **face of the future destruction of Nineveh**, the people did a fast and penance.

**Judges 20: 26-28** .... **Fasting releases direction for decisions (discernment)**

**Ezra 8:21, 31**.... Fasting **releases strategy and breakthrough in a crisis**

**Psalm 35:13**... faced with an **unjust persecution**, David fasts and does penance.

**Psalm 109:24**... in order to **receive the help of the Lord**, he fasts until he is weak in the knees.

**Psalm 35:13...** Fasting breaks pride and brings humility

**Isaiah 58:1 ....** Fasting releases revelation from God

**Judith 4:9-15...** Before the threats of Nebuchadnezzar, the Israelites offer praises, prayers, penance and fasting. The Lord heard their voices and saw their anguish.

**Esther 4:16...** Esther tells Mordecai: "Go and unite all the Jews that are in Susa and fast for me. Do not eat nor drink anything during three days and nights. My servant and I will also fast. And in this manner, regardless of the law, I will present myself before the King; if I have to die, I will die." (Esther is about to go before the king in defense of her people who were condemned to death. She is going to unmask the enemy. It almost seems as the petition of the Virgin of Fatima, who appeared with a star on her mantle. Esther means "star".) And in so many apparitions Our Lady has been asking for fasting even to detain the power of natural forces, the spirit of corruption in the world and to stop wars and violence.

Esther demonstrates maturity and wisdom in declaring a fast. She understood that the battle she was facing required more than herself and her power; she did not act in presumption. She knew that this situation was beyond her control and she called forth a fast and prayer, with penance, to deliver her people and break the plans of the enemy. Esther commanded a fast for all those with the sphere of her influence. She knew the power of communion in prayer and fasting, the power of crying out to the Lord with a community fasting and penance. She knew the Lord would bless her endeavor to save her people if they humble themselves before him. Therefore, for 3 days, Esther and all her people, prayed and fasted, for her to be able to go to the King's court, which was against the law, and unveiled the works of the enemy. During those three days, Esther, in prayer sustained and empowered by fasting, received the courage, the wisdom to confront wisely this evil. And she waited in trust in God's intervention. She was fulfilling the words of Isaiah 58:6 *"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free and that you break every yoke?"*

*.... Afterwards Mordecai told her: "maybe for this time you have been born and become a queen". She responded "I will go to the King and if I perish, I perish." She knew the danger that she was facing, but her love filled her with trust in the power of prayer, penance, putting ashes on her head and fasting, and filled her with courage to go to the king's court to unmask the deception, to loose the bonds, to let the oppressed go free and lift the yoke of her people.*

### **FASTING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

**Matthew 4; Luke 4...** We see Jesus in the desert praying without eating or drinking anything for 40 days to prepare for his public messianic ministry. Power to confront the enemy's temptations.

**Mark 9:29...** "This kind of devil can only be cast out by prayer and fasting."

**Luke 2:37...** "Ana did not leave the Temple, serving God with fasting and prayer."

**Luke 4:14...** "Fasting strengthens the spirit and anoints to fulfill the mission".

**Acts 13:3...** "The community, after having prayed and fasted, laid hands on them and sent them off."

**Acts 14:23...** "Presbyters were chosen in each church, and after fasting and praying, they entrusted them to the Lord."

**Col. 3:3...** "I rejoice in my sufferings, which I carry for you, thus completing in my flesh what is lacking in the tribulations of Christ, in favor of His Body, which is the Church."

**1 Cor. 9:25...** "athletes deprive themselves of all things and this for a corruptible crown, we, however, for one that is incorruptible."

**Acts 13:2...** Choosing and sending off: "One day as these men were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.' Then, completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off."

## THE TEMPTATIONS IN THE DESERT

An important passage for us to meditate upon is Matthew 4, the temptations in the desert. Within it we find many teachings that are necessary for the spiritual life. I will concentrate on those which I think demonstrate the importance of fasting.

Jesus receives his Baptism and the Holy Spirit descends upon Him, and a voice is heard which says, *"This is my well-beloved Son. Listen to him"*. Immediately, that same Spirit takes Him to the desert (a solitary place, dry, dangerous and without any provisions at all), to be in prayer and fasting for 40 days and nights. After he was hungry the devil appeared to tempt him. The desert is necessary so that the Lord can speak, strengthen and make us conquer the battles of our flesh. He has always revealed Himself to His people in an extraordinary way during times of being in the desert and He has always prepared His people for mission during the times of being in the desert. But precisely because of this, the devil also wages a great battle in the desert in order to place obstacles to what God wants to do.

Jesus prepares Himself for this battle with prayer and fasting of 40 days and nights. How do we prepare ourselves for the battles that our lives wage in the contemporary world? We prepare ourselves with prayer and fasting. When we feel greater temptations, we must pray and fast more.

The Israelites are freed from Egypt and are taken to the desert towards the Promised Land. Just a short time after leaving Egypt and of walking through the desert, their resources were depleting. *Then, they began to rebel against Moses and their first complaint was about being hungry and thirsty, demanding that he provide for them. The Lord works the miracle of the manna, and of having water come out from the rock when Moses struck it with his staff.* Jesus fasts and with His fast, He makes reparation for the complaints and injuries of the Israelites which were done in the desert against God.

**First temptation:** Jesus experiences hunger (a human reality) and here the devil takes advantage in order to throw out his first temptation and seduction: *"If you are the Son of God, make these rocks into bread."* Jesus replies: *"Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."* (Deut. 8:3)

The devil is not able to make Jesus fall even though He was hungry, because, through His fasting, He had placed His need to satisfy His hunger, His physical gratification, in second place. *Through fasting, we dominate this area so that when the temptation comes to us, we can resist it. How many appetites need to be ordered by fasting, not only the food, which it can be a great temptation, but the appetites of comfort, of having good things at all times.*

Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the God." Jesus responds making reference to Deuteronomy 8. This is a characteristic of Christ, to *show us that to fulfill the will of God gives greater life than that which we can receive by eating.* This response of Christ reveals to us what those 40 days were: *there was no bread or water, but there was a profound communication with the Father. This is more important than anything else: not to seek our food outside of the will of God. This means that we should not satisfy the appetites of our body, emotions, sexuality, mind, ego, fame, recognition, etc. outside His will.*

**Second temptation** "He is taken to the pinnacle of the temple and is told: *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written: your angels will come to your rescue, they will carry you in their hands so that your foot will not stumble upon any stone."* Jesus tells him: *"It is also written; you shall not tempt the Lord your God."* (Deut. 6:16)

The devil is tempting Jesus to take control of things outside of obedience and trust in the Father. It was the temptation of personal satisfaction of being served by the angels, instead of coming to serve. Of dominating before humbly serving. Jesus is tempted in this area after having fasted; could this be because fasting has the power to free us from our egos and pride, and need of control? To free us from our desire to be served and honored?

**Third Temptation:** *"He is taken to a very high mountain and is shown all the kingdoms of the world and is told: 'I will give you all of this if you prostrate yourself before me in adoration.'* Jesus responded: *'Get away from me, Satan, for it is written: The Lord your God you will adore and give worship to.'"* (Deut 6:13) The devil tempts Him with earthly power and fame. Could it be that fasting liberates us from these desires? Could it be that

when we experience our weakness, emptiness, and need that in fasting we recognize that we are creatures, dependent on God, and thus we are freed from the great temptation to adore false gods, to create idols of ourselves, others, or things?

The three temptations in the desert were directed towards **pleasure, power and fame**. The three were presented during the 40 days of prayer and fasting. The three were overcome with the contrary virtues: self-denial, total submission to God and His Word, and humility—three virtues that are the fruit of fasting. The Old Testament reveals to us the power of fasting over our external enemies; the New Testament also reveals to us the power it has to overcome the enemies of our soul: the flesh, the devil and the world.

### **FRUITS OF FASTING:**

Fasting is not an end in itself, but a means to conversion. It brings us to conversion by conducting us to freedom of mind and heart. It is a process through which we are freed from the earthly attachments, disordered affections and to all those things that keep us bound: *willfulness, desires, excessive self-preservation, and it leads us to peace. Fasting strengthens and stabilizes us and helps us develop self-control (one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit). At the same time, it helps us to recognize our weakness and dependence on God and helps us grow in poverty of spirit. It edifies our interior life by eliminating the excesses in our life in order to make more room for God. Fasting leads us more readily towards a life of inner union with God and with the heavenly world; fasting frees us from the burdens and attachments of material things. The saints recommend fasting to all those who desire to achieve greater interiority. Fasting debilitates, little by little, our concupiscence.*

### **FASTING AND THE WORD OF GOD**

Matthew 4:4: “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

John 4:32: “My food is to do the will of the One who has sent me and to fulfill His work.” When we fast, we must also dedicate more time to prayer, meditation on the Scriptures enriching our minds by finding our food, our satisfaction, in the truth. We ought to permit our souls to be filled with the Word that is life, that frees us and that elevates us and teaches us to think, feel and to act according to the will of God. On the days of fasting, I have found, for some reason, that **it is easier to penetrate into the Scriptures, to meditate on them and to capture more profoundly the message that is hidden behind its words**. Through fasting, we give priority to the soul.

### **FASTING AND THE EUCHARIST**

John 6:27: “Work not for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

The physical emptiness that we experience in fasting helps us **to become more aware of our interior emptiness and our need for spiritual realities. In a preeminent manner, the day of fasting ought to be a Eucharistic day: adoration, reparation, etc.** It also awakens our desire to be hungry for the bread of life, which is the Eucharist. That is also the reason of the Eucharistic fast. It is an expression of preparing ourselves to receive the true food, Jesus Himself.

### **Bread and water: two important symbols in the Scriptures**

Bread, in Sacred Scripture, symbolizes life and nourishment. (Bread, food – Eucharist) Water, another preeminent symbol in Scripture, often has the connotation of purification as we see in the water that flows from His Pierced Heart, which symbolizes Baptism. Additionally, two miracles that the Lord worked with the Israelites while they were in the desert are centered on these elements of bread and water. Some choose to fast on bread and water most commonly on Wednesdays and/or Fridays. Bread is the food of the poor. The disposition to live on bread and water for a day demonstrates the good will one has to be poor before God and well-disposed to His will.

Seek true life by means of purification. Fasting on bread and water is a call to grow in dependence on the Eucharist. It is also a call to enter into a life of purification, of conversion, of stripping ourselves of all that separates us from the Lord or does not allow us to be His adoptive sons, nor His image and likeness.

*John 6:34: “I am the bread of life, he who comes to me will not hunger, he who believes in me will not thirst.”*



### **WE HAVE HEARD THE BLESSED VIRGIN CALL US TO FASTING:**

We hear repeated messages from Our Lady of Medjugorje regarding fasting:

“Your fasting has the power to prevent wars and natural catastrophes.”

“Practice fasting because with fasting you will obtain the complete realization of the plan that God has. With this you will make me most happy.”

“I invite you to prayer and fasting. With your help I can do all things and oblige Satan to no longer instigate souls.” Mark 9:29: “That kind of devil can only be cast out with prayer and fasting.”

“Pray and fast, only in this manner you will be able to know what is evil within you and to offer it to God with the hope that He will purify your hearts of all things.”

In a recent message, Our Lady Queen of peace said: February 25, 2021 *“Dear children! God has permitted me to be with you also today, to call you to prayer and fasting. Live this time of grace and be witnesses of hope, because I repeat to you, little children, that with prayer and fasting also wars can be suppressed. Little children, believe and live this time of grace in faith and with faith; and my Immaculate Heart does not leave any of you in peacelessness if you have recourse to me. I intercede for you before the Most High and I pray for peace in your hearts and for hope for the future. Thank you for having responded to my call.”*

**ST JOHN PAUL II ON THE NEED TO FAST TO CONQUER THE “SPIRIT OF DEATH AND THE CULTURE OF DEATH”.** *“I repeat what I said to those families who carry out their challenging mission amid so many difficulties: a great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. Jesus himself has shown us by his own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil (cf. Mt 4:1-11). As he taught his disciples, some demons cannot be driven out except in this way (cf. Mk 9:29). Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to pray and fast so that power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit: the walls which conceal from the sight of so many of our brothers and sisters the evil of practices and laws which are hostile to life. May this same power turn their hearts to resolutions and goals inspired by the civilization of life and love.” (Evangelium Vitae, n. 100)*

### **FASTING APPEASES the spirit of GLUTTONY**

With fasting we learn to dominate ourselves and to free ourselves from the sin of gluttony, which does not only manifest itself in the excessive eating, but also in more refined and spiritual forms.

1. **Intellectual gluttony:** uncontrolled desire in the areas of knowledge (curiosity) of science. This is very dangerous because it was the first sin of Eve, curiosity. From here comes the occult, psychics, astrology, the palm reading, etc... a desire to know the future.
2. **Spiritual gluttony:** seeking sentiments that come from pious reading and sensible pleasures—not wanting to miss out on any spiritual experience.
3. **Gluttony of pleasure, honor or fame:** one does anything in order to have attention, to be recognized, etc.

**Saint John Chrysostom:** *“The value of fasting consists not only on avoiding certain foods, but of renouncing to all attitudes, thoughts and sinful desires. Whoever limits fasting simply to food is minimizing the great value that fasting has. If you fast, prove it in your actions! If you see a brother in need, have compassion on him. If you see a brother receiving recognition, do not envy him. For fasting to be true, it cannot be so only in our mouths, it must be a fasting of our eyes, ears, feet, hands... of all our bodies, interior and exterior.*

Fast with your hands by keeping them pure in the disinterested service of others. Fast in your feet by not being slow in love and service. Fast with your eyes by not seeing impure things or by not looking at others to criticize them. Fast of all that puts your soul or your holiness in danger. It will be useless to deny my body food while I am feeding my heart with waste, with impurity, with selfishness, with competitions, with comfort.

You fast of food, but you allow yourself to hear vain and worldly things. You ought to also fast with your ears. You ought to fast from hearing things that are said about your brothers, lies that are said about others, especially gossip, rumors, cold words that are hurtful and against others. You also ought to fast with your mouth; you ought to fast from saying anything bad about others. For of what value is it for you to not eat if you devour your brother?" (From homily *On Fasting*)

What does St. John Chrysostom want to tell us with this reflection?

That the days of fasting ought to be special days of abstaining from all disordered and exaggerated use of our senses. (To not look at what I should not, to not speak what I should not, to not hear what I should not, to not desire what I should not, to not seek satisfaction of my emotional or spiritual needs; to not seek to fill my loneliness by immediately seeking companionship; to not want to know everything; to not seek immediate answers to all that comes into my mind, etc.) We fast seeking conversion. **Therefore, we must fast from all of these attitudes that are contrary to virtue.** Perhaps your fasting will be about having the spirit of service (to fast from sloth, from comfort). For just as the Blessed Virgin Mary asks us to pray with the heart, we need to fast with our hearts. Maybe we need to fast from our anger by being more amiable, sweeter and more docile on the days we fast. Maybe I have to fast from pride by actively seeking to be humbled and by doing concrete acts of humility, etc.

### FASTING AND BODILY PURITY

Let us listen to Cardinal Ratzinger:

*"To fast means to accept an essential aspect of the Christian life. It is necessary to discover again the corporal aspect of our faith: the refraining from eating is one of those aspects. Sexuality and nourishment are two central elements of the physical dimension of man: today, a greater lack of understanding of virginity corresponds to a greater lack of understanding of fasting. And one and the other lack of understanding proceed from the same root: the actual darkening of the eschatological tension, which is to say, of the tension of the Christian faith towards eternal life. To be chaste and to know how to periodically fast is to testify that eternal life awaits us; even more, that it is already within us. Without virginity and without fasting, the Church is not Church; it loses its sense of the transcendental, and submerges itself in the world.*

"Today more than ever, penance and mortification are necessary in order to expiate our sins and to repair for those of the whole world. Through the years, humanity has always been sinful, but it recognized it and would do penance for this. Today this is not so; one lives in sin and does not call it sin, but rather is proud of it. All moral and ethical principles are being rejected and for this reason humanity has lost its interior freedom and has become a victim of the worst dictators: fleshly desires and passions and the devil. *"It seems to me that fasting, as a common and public act of the Church, is as necessary today as it was yesterday; it is a public witness both of the primacy of God and of spiritual values such as solidarity with all those who go hungry. If we do not fast, we will not be able to free ourselves of certain devils of our times."* (The Ratzinger Report, pp. 113-114)

**The Catechism of the Catholic Church, says: "The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. (2 Tim. 4) Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and mortification that gradually leads to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes. (CCC, 2015)**

### FASTING AND CHARITY

Fasting cannot be separated from fraternal charity. If a Christian would deny himself all things, it is in order to give them to his brothers and be, therefore, a testimony of his love for God. Pius XII (1950): *"Let people devote to charity what they withdraw from vanities, and mercifully meet the needs of the Church and of her poor."* (as cited in *Fidei Donum*, n. 61) Saint Augustine: "Your denials will be fruitful if you demonstrate patience with others." (cf. Lenten Sermons) Privations are Christian if they make us grow in holiness, in charity and generosity. In the first Christian communities, whenever there was a poor person among them who needed to be helped, they would fast for two or three days, accustomed to send him nourishments that they had prepared for themselves." The primitive Church observed two days of fasting during the week: Wednesdays and Fridays.



May we seek during this Lent to be delivered from disordered attachments as to grow into communion with the Heart of Christ and be renewed interiorly to have a new heart just like His.