

FASTING

Just a short follow-up to my last blog, a point I wanted to make is that even our fully human Savior experienced a prayerful moment of anguish in the garden. I struggle to think this was the only such conversation HE had with **HIS FATHER**...especially over **HIS** impending Passion that was approaching. **HE** had been mentioning it for weeks as HE and HIS disciples made their way to Jerusalem so it seems unlikely to me that this was the first time Jesus had broached the possibility of another way "out". The agony in the garden, a story that could only have come from Jesus (for no one else was present), exhibits a clear sense of both desperation and eventual surrender to the will of the **FATHER**. Often times, our lives can contain moments just like these. In the end, our surrender is the only true path "out".

For the record, fasting does not mean for-going a rib-eye on Fridays. Unfortunately, humanity seems to have historically sought the "easy way out" and giving up meat on days of fasting and abstinence have become the definition we lean on. Fasting isn't so much about denying ourselves meat or some other luxury food as much as it is an effective means to grow in humility by intentionally depriving ourselves of a physical pleasure for the purpose of eliciting a "teaching moment" from the Holy Spirit. But it can't stop there. **Fasting** is about the process of opening our hearts and minds to a deeper relationship with, and surrender to, **GOD's Will** for us. When I was young, before I joined the Church, we had some close family friends who were Catholic and each Lent, on Fridays, they would have lobster or swordfish steaks instead of beef. I remember thinking as a kid that I would rather have lobster or crab legs instead of beef anyway...what good does that do? At least the old baked fish sticks provided some level of mortification to prompt the Spirit to "speak up", as they say. Maybe helping us to create new habits that are better for our health, or more discipline in our finances, whatever it is that is needed in our lives. The key here is that just denying ourselves a certain pleasure creates no lasting benefit without combining it with a heart and mind that seeks a deeper, more meaningful spirituality. We have to want it. The same is true of everything in life. A college education doesn't guarantee success, ambition or drive does. Athletic practice alone doesn't produce championships. Combined with desire it does. Religious rubrics are important but without love and devotion, it is empty. That is why prayer and fasting are often mentioned together. How many times have we said to ourselves, "My heart isn't hard...that scripture doesn't apply to me"? I think of Romans 2 or Psalm 51 here.

There are over 100 references in Scripture that refer to our hearts being either hard or closed to GOD, in fact, this was the great sin of Israel. They were a pious chosen people, precious to GOD. Their impediment was their arrival at a "place of devotion" that was "clinical" and closed off to deeper reality, thus Jesus' comment that **HE** came to complete the Law of Moses, not abolish it. Fasting reminds us who we are (children of **GOD**) and that a greater purpose is in play, whether we want to participate or not. The greatest commandment, *"You shall love the Lord your GOD with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind....the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the law and the prophets"* (Matthew 22:37) These two sum up the entire law of Moses and everything the prophets tried to teach. To simplify more, we must place **GOD** before **ALL** things in our life, everything and everyone, **and** loving our neighbor **IS** loving **GOD**. How often have we read or heard this verse and still struggle placing the **LORD** before everything else in our lives? This is a **hardness of heart**. **Prayer** and **Fasting** open us up to this understanding by reminding us how small we truly are. **Jesus'** tag on this verse is extraordinary and worth noting. **HE** says (paraphrasing), "Understand this and you understand everything, necessary to know, about the **FATHER**." **Fasting**, as in denying ourselves normal sustenance, works to enforce in us our connection to all life around us and our need for **GOD**. It should help us gain the awareness that our true food is **Jesus**, and only in this "meal" can we receive the sustenance that can save our lives. We need only show up, with a humble heart, for the banquet knowing who the "guest of honor" is and how it was "prepared". I don't intentionally mean to over-simplify things, but I feel there is a certain tension in our hearts to make things more complicated and harder to discern, when they are not. We have theologians and scripture academics for this purpose. A loving and generous parent would never set goals for us that are near impossible to accomplish. **HE** has provided for us " **the Way, the Truth, and the Life**" to shine the light on our path. It is neither complicated or difficult to understand. It requires only a child-like heart that trusts...completely.

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Comments, Questions, Random Thoughts?

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