

February 11, 2018

It's Lent?!

Peace to you all. We interrupt our regularly scheduled programming for... Lent. The week of the Epiphany, I mentioned that time is flying and we are moving out of Christmas and will be in Lent before we know it. This Wednesday, it's here. In that column a month ago, I mentioned Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Remember? It was called "Time Flies" and ran the week of January 7th. Look it up for ideas in case Lent has snuck up on you.

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday we are required to Fast. In the column of last November 12th (called "Heart of the World XLVIII") I talked about Fasting:

"Fasting is the spiritual practice of the discipline of denying ourselves things we want, and even in short term, need. Classically, it involves refraining from food, or at least certain types of food, but it can take many forms that is limited only by our creativity. It is an ancient practice and Jesus speaks of it as something that He assumes everyone is doing. (i.e. Mt 6:16)

Fasting can be helpful in a few different regards. It strengthens our will, reminds us to pray, and fosters in us a spirit of generosity. That last one is a little counter-intuitive and needs some unpacking. It is also the real reason that fasting is a valuable practice.

Firstly, when we deny ourselves short term pleasure/fulfillment for long term goals, we train ourselves always to behave by thinking first—even in crisis. Fasting can be a great spiritual practice for this. Although self-mastery is *not* the intended purpose of fasting, *it definitely can be an intended side-effect*. Unfortunately, this is what most people think fasting is about.

When our stomachs are empty and we feel the hunger pangs, it is a reminder to us to pray and also to offer the discomfort as a prayer in my very body even when I am not able to be recollected and mentally attentive because of duties, etc.

Finally, closely related to the last point, when we feel the pangs it is also a reminder to us of how much we have. That is to lead us to thank God for our bounty and also remind us to look for ways to share it with those who are not so blessed. That kind of generosity makes us imitate God in His bounty—always sharing."

The season of Lent is an opportunity for us to ponder the mystery of Our Lord's love. It is a call to us to do two things primarily. 1) Acknowledge and own my cooperation (through my personal sin and sinfulness) in the plight of the world and its need for a Savior, and 2) instead of lugubriously sinking into despair, embracing God's Love of and for me and striving to respond in kind.

Fasting is a great practice to foster both of these in us.

Fr. Michael