

Heart of the World XLVIII

“Like the heart in the body, the very center and life-moving force of the Church is the Eucharist. All of the other Sacraments and the whole life of Grace and the Church in the world flow from it and lead back to it.”

Mary directs us to her Son in many ways, but primarily through the Sacraments—particularly the Eucharist and Confession. It is her very *raison d’être* and her greatest joy. This past year we have celebrated the centenary of her apparitions at Fatima and in this column have considered what that can mean to us today. Last week, we introduced the very practical direction for living a life of Grace and holiness that our Blessed Mother has spoken of at Medjugorje—the five stones.

Drawing on the biblical account of David and Goliath (see 1Sam 17), she has compared our attempt to live authentically Christian lives in this secularized society as a similarly mismatched fight. However, just as David went out to meet Goliath in battle completely trusting that the fight is the Lord’s, Mary gives us five stones to use: Prayer, Fasting, Mass, reading/praying with the Bible, and Confession. Let us look at this very practical advice as we conclude this Church year of 2017.

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.