

Monday, Jan. 16, 2017

Importance of Fasting

God desires and expects His followers to fast. Jesus Christ was asked why His disciples did not fast like other religious people. He replied with a short parable explaining that it was because He was still present with His disciples. He stated that after He was no longer among them (referring to His impending return to heaven), “*then they will fast*”

By that, He meant that *all of His future disciples would fast*. Why? Because we need fasting with prayer to help us maintain a close relationship with God and Jesus Christ. And there are other major spiritual benefits of fasting as well.

In Mathew chapter 6, when Jesus spoke to His disciples about *how* to fast, He clearly was expecting that they *would* fast. He did not say “*if* you fast” but He started by saying, “*when* you fast.” We should note that in this chapter, Jesus emphasizes prayer, fasting and doing good works. All three legs are important for us in our spiritual growth.

When we fast, I like to think that we give our prayer life a “super-charge.” In essence, we are able to spiritually see things more clearly. It allows us to mortify our body and gain control over our desires. Fasting, in effect, will prepare us for that spiritual battle that is to come. When we fast, we learn to fight the good fight over our daily temptations and this helps us to remain obedient towards God when the going gets tough. For those who are suffering from a reoccurring sin in their life, there are three things that I would recommend doing to help win the battle over that evil spirit. Frequent the Sacrament of Reconciliation, receive the Eucharist as much as possible, and fast regularly. As the Lord told His disciples, some spirits can only be defeated through prayer and fasting, not just by prayers alone.

Fasting for someone else is also an excellent way to use our suffering and mortification to assist them with their spiritual life. For example, I know a wonderful Catholic lady who has been fasting for her four daughters since their birth. For one daughter, she has fasted from chocolate for 21 years. She absolutely loved chocolate and when her daughter was born,

she decided to fast for her and abstained from chocolate. Fasting for her daughters and husband for many years has been a true blessing for their family as today they are all faith filled people who love and serve the Lord. So if we have a loved one who does not yet know God, then may I recommend that we fast for them. It is never too late.

Another form of fasting can be to take on something that we might not like doing such as exercise or some form of daily penance.

For myself, an example of this occurred while our children were still quite young. In prayer, the Lord kept asking me to get rid of the television that we had in our home. During morning prayers, I would hear the Lord say in my heart, “get rid of the TV, get rid of the TV!” This would go on and on. After a month of this, I approached my wife and said, “I think the Lord is asking me to get rid of the Roger’s digital cable box.” Her response was right on cue; “You think?” as if to say, I totally agree with that.

You see, I would come home from work every day and spend hours in front of the TV. The Lord knew that my calling as a husband and father was to come home and be present to my family rather than to watch TV. My excuse was, I needed to de-stress from the pressures of work, but apparently God had another plan.

So my wife agreed and we went from the Rogers digital cable box to basic cable. I was so proud of myself! Afterwards, during prayer, I kept hearing the Lord say to me, “Get rid of the TV, get rid of the TV.” I guess I thought it was a negotiation, so my response was, “I got rid of the upgraded cable, Lord, now I only have basic cable, isn’t that enough?” The Lord would still respond, “Get rid of the TV, Mike!”

So after one month of this, I approached my wife and told her how the Lord was asking me to eliminate cable all together. Her response was the same, “You think?” Little did I know, that, during all this time she had been praying, asking the Lord for me to be more present to our family. Who says the Lord doesn’t answer our prayers?

Well, when we finally did get rid of the cable, it truly was a blessing for us. The kids were very young so they did not miss it. I spent more time with the family and my prayer life was enriched through that small mortification. We all felt the effects as our family came together in love and we were able to spend much more quality time together. As the kids grew up, their hearts were protected from the violence and graphic scenes so readily available on television. For myself, my heart was also softened as I found that I was no longer able to watch action films which contained much violence. Our home is also spiritually clean since we are protecting against any unwanted spirits from coming in through the television and by what we watch.

Today, we use our TV to watch movies or documentaries about the lives of the saints. Looking back, I now realize that the Lord had so much more in store for our family.

I can't imagine where I would be today if I hadn't listened to that gentle but persistent inspiration to "fast" from television.

Fasting is an important part of building a strong relationship with God. It can vary depending on our personal situation. We should pray and ask the Lord how He is calling us to fast.

He may call you to abstain from certain foods or take on a form of fasting to eliminate something in your life like He did with me.

By fasting, we are essentially saying "no" to ourselves and "yes" to God. The simple act of fasting, praying and waiting will undoubtedly provide amazing results in your life and in those whom you are fasting for. Just fast, pray and wait and see what the Lord will have in store for you and your family.

All glory be to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Amen