

29. October 2019

Answering Questions, Part 2 „The Fasting“

How to start fasting?

This issue will always be addressed, because fasting is an important part of spiritual and ascetic life. In our Catholic Church, as we know, it has almost completely disappeared and is only practiced by individual people who perceive a call of the Spirit to integrate fasting into their lives. It is better in Orthodox Christianity, who know fasting before the holy liturgy and also practice physical fasting in various ways. Fasting is almost unknown to the Protestants, at most that individual persons take it up.

In fact, there are only two days of fasting in the Catholic Church and the rule one hour before the Holy Mass no more food to eat (CCC 919). On these two days of fasting, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, food is reduced (CCC 1251). In some places, it is still observed that one does not eat meat on Fridays. But one cannot really speak of the practice of fasting, but only of relics of fasting orders. To understand and practice fasting as a spiritual weapon has been almost lost, with exceptions.

It is not easy to regain fasting in an ecclesiastical atmosphere that has lost this important dimension. This requires a personal decision, because one is hardly supported by others.

Physical fasting is a sacrifice and at the same time a break from a natural habit that is self-evident and loved.

It is good to understand why you want to fast. There should be religious motives: *"Fasting reduces selfishness in us and opens the heart to the poor"*, a church text say during Lent.

Two important motives are mentioned here.

- a) The mental fight against selfishness, which is very easily linked to food intake. How many thoughts and conversations revolve around food. How much worry and effort are associated, with how much one is concerned - beyond the

appropriate measure - with food and the often associated desire. You don't notice it much, because you're so used to it and you can't imagine any other way.

Fasting breaks this routine and leads to another freedom. One learns to renounce and not always submit to the demands of my nature and thus regain a piece of dominion over me on the ascetic level. But this also serves the deepening of the spiritual life and the inner armament for the spiritual struggle

- b) The opening of the heart to the poor is added. Conscious renunciation of the needs of our life can make it easier to understand and share the situation of other people who are not voluntarily reducing their food. Fasting, when we feel more the demand of our nature for food intake, teaches us easier the plight of starving people. You learn to know it more from the inside.

But there are many more motivations for fasting, e.g. to be more able to resist the powers of darkness (*cf. Mt 17,21*), to offer sacrifices for certain causes to the Lord (e.g. to fast for the recently deceased) and to be connected with the suffering of the Lord.

With the above question how to start fasting is essentially the motivation: Fasting is given to God because one wants to please the Lord, because one prepares oneself for the spiritual struggle, because one follows an inner impulse. The motivation is therefore important, so that you can more easily get through what you have set out to do.

How to start now?

I would recommend Wednesday and Friday or at least the last day. The classic fasting is with water and bread.

If this hurdle seems too high, you may start fasting with water and bread on Friday until the hour of Jesus' death, and then have a light meal. This is very fruitful in connection with the suffering of the Lord. Thus it is advisable to pray the painful Rosary on this day, to consider in the scriptures the suffering of Jesus, perhaps also to offer stations of the Way of the Cross as a participation in his cross.

Jesus himself said in response to a question about fasting that on the day of his Death his disciples will fast (*cf. Mt 9,14-15*) and every Friday is a memory of the death of the Lord.

So my concrete advice: Try first to conquer the Friday for fasting, then listen to the Holy Spirit to lead you step by step, as it is appropriate for the personal life situation.