

FASTING?



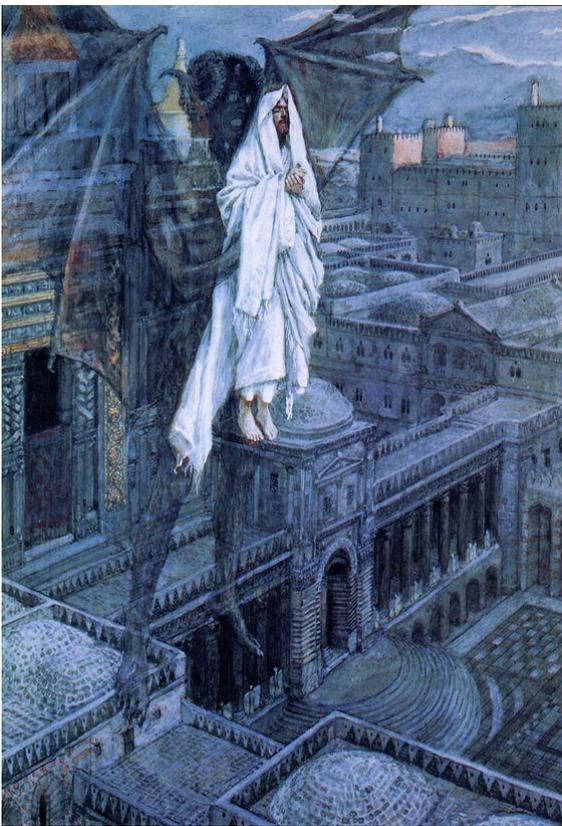
It is an ancient tradition for the Church to remind us that the Great Lent (and every Lenten period for that matter), is not only a time for fasting physically (absence of certain foods) but equally importantly to abstain from judgment of the others, gossiping and all these passions that come out of our mouths, together with prayer and almsgiving. As the Scriptures tell us (Mt 15:11), most important is what comes out of the mouth, not what goes in.

This is why the Lord Himself condemned the Pharisaic attitudes, not only of what comes out of the mouth, but the entire disposition in life. True fasting is to abstain from what is not the “true food” that is the will of God (Jn 4,34).

That being said, I have a feeling that ο Πονηρός (the deceiver) has intensified an attack on fasting εκ δεξιών (*from the right side*, the side that no one expects an attack, in other words). I read in so many postings, and even sermons/postings of Priests, that food fasting does not matter much, what matters is fasting only from the

other passions...making you ascertain that traditional food fasting has no real place (not vital) in our spiritual path; maybe, only as a sacrifice...giving up something (chocolates, let's say).

I do want to believe that this is not the intention behind the postings; I myself post/preach the same way to stress out that Great Lent is not only about food fasting; but nevertheless food-fasting is a very important, if not the most important, ingredient of a healthy spiritual path.



In the first pages of the Book of Genesis, the very beginning of the Holy Scriptures, the Lord God commands Adam and Eve to abstain from partaking of the forbidden fruit. "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2, 16-17). The response of humanity (through Adam and Eve)

to that original commandment for fasting, was disobedience. And that original disobedience and the following consistent ungratefulness brought death and corruption in our lives.

If we look at the history of fasting, we will see that by no means is it a Christian or even Jewish phenomenon, only. Fasting has played a key role in most of the world's major religions; from Ancient Greece (Pythagoras) to Islam. Through, what we call the history of salvation, we see fasting everywhere in the Sacred Scriptures, also; from Moses (Ex 34,28) and Ezra (Ezra 8,21) to prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 19,7-8) and the people of Nineveh, responding to prophet Jonah's call to repentance (Jonah 3,9), to mention just a few.

All this reminds to us what we call, ο Σπερματικός Λόγος (Ratio Seminalis/Seminal Reason), the presence and influence of the Word of God in all cultures, before his incarnation and beyond Israel. We, thus, see the existence of fasting as another kind of Σπερματικός Λόγος in all cultures and religions.

A survey of the Fathers of the Church (and most importantly St. Basil the Great in his *Sermo de Jejuniō/About Fasting*, PG 31, 163-98) shows that they understood fasting as a way to humble ourselves before God.

Adam and Eve, not only violated the fasting commandment of the Lord before they were expelled from Paradise but, even more, ungratefully refused to humble themselves in front of God and ask for His forgiveness when they were given the opportunity (Gen 3,8-13).

Fasting therefore, is, our personal and communal, voluntary answer/response to that original commandment. By fasting we proclaim that unlike our ancestors, we are obedient to God's commandment and we humble ourselves before Him. And this act of Reconciliation with God is what makes fasting so important; not the health benefits or the sacrifice we make, but our voluntary obedience to God's original commandment.

Only in this light/perspective, can it be understood why even the Lord Jesus Christ had to fast prior to starting His public ministry. For the same reason He had to be Baptized; to correct the original record and to "fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3,15) because His "food is to do the will of the one who sent Him and to finish His work" (Jn 4,34).

By Fr. N

