

The Lenten Fast

As we enter the season of Great Lent in preparation for the celebration of our Lord's Resurrection at Pascha, it is an opportune time to reflect on the nature of this ancient practice as well as the spiritual benefits that can be obtained when we fast in the right spirit. Following are a few excerpts from Holy Fathers concerning the subject of fasting:

Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. (Matt. 15:11) "The Lord said this not because He did not favor fasting, or because He considered it unnecessary for us. No, He Himself fasted, and taught the Apostles to do so, and He established fasts in His Holy Church. Rather, He said this so that not only would we fast by eating little or only uncooked food, but we might also keep the fast in our soul, not indulging it with desires and passionate inclinations. This is the important thing. Fasting serves as a powerful means for this. The foundation of the passions is the flesh; when the flesh is emaciated, then it is as if the passions are undermined and their fortress is destroyed. Without fasting, overcoming the passions would be a miracle, similar to being in a fire and not being burned. How can he who profusely satisfies his flesh with food, sleep and rest keep anything spiritual in his mind and in his intentions? It would be as easy for him to renounce the earth, to contemplate and strive for the invisible world, as it is for an old decrepit bird to rise up from the earth." +*St. Theophan the Recluse*

"That It Must Be a Fast of Soul and Body: It is not the enemy that is outside us whom we need to fear; there is an enemy in our very selves: daily within us an internal war is waged. When the enemy within is conquered, all our foes without are rendered feeble, and Christ's soldier will find all things at peace, and all subdued. We shall have no external foe to fear if what is within is conquered, and subdued to the spirit. Nor let us suppose that the outward fast from visible food will suffice to secure perfection of heart and purity of body, unless it have conjoined with a fast of the soul as well." +*St. John Cassian*

"The value of fasting consists not in abstinence only from food, but in a relinquishment of sinful practices... Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works...For let not the mouth only fast...but all the members of our bodies...Let also the mouth fast from foul words. For what does it profit if we abstain from birds and fish, and yet bite and devour our brethren?" +*St. John Chrysostom*

Brothers and Sisters, fasting is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. The proud Pharisee fasted, but because he trusted in himself that he was righteous, he

was not justified before God, since he lacked the virtues of love, humility and repentance. Fasting helps us to overcome the passions and acquire the virtues, which lead to salvation—the ultimate purpose and goal of our lives. With humility and repentance let us ask God’s help in this struggle, that we may be victorious over evil and sin and truly rise with Christ in His Holy Resurrection!

In Christ, +Fr. Gregory