

Fasting for the Transfiguration

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Lent is the season for reflecting upon and delighting in the goodness of our God.

What we try to do in Lent is change our behavior and our vision so that we can recognize the Lord in the ordinariness of our daily routine. To delight in him when he suddenly reveals his Godhead to us in a Transfiguration experience. To rejoice, like Peter in today's Gospel seeing Jesus transfigured: "Lord, it is good that we are here" (Mt 17:4) whenever we become aware of God's manifestation of himself in our life. Most often, however, we fail to recognize God in the ordinary daily events and encounters at home and in our workplace. We have relegated God to the church, housed him apart. We set aside a separate day for him. But don't we say that God is almighty, is everywhere and anywhere 24 hours a day? A Transfiguration experience, a spiritual high, and ecstatic sacred feeling must occur to tell us "Hey, look, I am here, talk to me... Didn't you recognize me in the person you just snarled at end in that little child you embraced?" Open your eyes. Oh my, we hardly know how to open our eyes. We need a little awakening. And that is precisely the spirit of Lent: an arousing, a stirring, a focusing.

During this season we commemorate the forty days of fasting and prayer that Jesus experienced before he began his public ministry. His fast focused his vision, strengthened his resolve and encouraged him concerning his Father's sustaining presence. We have always been taught in school that Lent is for prayer and fasting. And maybe we should remind ourselves of the benefits of fasting as Jesus has shown us: to make us less focused on ourselves and be more aware of our Lord's indwelling in our hearts.

When we fast our conscience becomes more active and able to protect us from evil deeds and, therefore, more able to resist temptations. Fasting makes us think of our Creator more, develops our inclination for love and charity and makes us taste the sweetness of the Lord. And let's not forget there are physical and material benefits from fasting as well as the spiritual ones:

-We relieve our stomach and digestive organs by giving them much needed rest. Even machines and tools require times of rest, or they break down. We are recharged and ready to face another week of work after a weekend of rest. You'll notice great benefits if you give your stomach a rest.

-You get free medicine. Various glands secrete certain acids in the stomach on account of hunger and thirst. These acids kills many of the germs which can produce different illnesses and infections. Medical research has shown that people who have a habit of fasting are less likely to incur digestive and other diseases. Their fasting has produced defensive antibodies and immunizers.

-Fasting is good for mental discipline. The brain benefits greatly from fasting, it sharpens the mind and makes us alert and sensitive to mental effort. We concentrate more readily if our stomach is empty and not drawing blood from the brain to work hard on digesting heavy food. if

you are doing heavy study, needing deep concentration, doing mental planning and organizing, you do better if you fast periodically.

-Eating becomes a greater joy. Our stomach, liver, pancreas, and intestines are overworked. We keep loading them with food, even before they are halfway through their work. When the digestive system is given a vacation, these organs become relaxed and happy. Eating, therefore, becomes a more enjoyable exercise.

-Fasting freshens and rejuvenates our skin. Fasting has been found to be a great restorer of youth. It lengthens life. People who fast acquire a clearer skin, a rosier tint to their cheeks and more youthful complexion than they had before. Doctors advise people troubled with skin diseases to eliminate sweets and fats from their diet. If food is cut off periodically, the skin pores are able to clean themselves and are freed from the effects of too many sweets and too much fat.

-Fasting helps stop drinking and smoking. A person on a fast needs to include abstaining from alcohol and cigarettes. By stopping tobacco, alcohol and food intake for a time, fasting helps the body return to normal. With the good feeling of a body cleansed of its toxins and freshly washed inside, the smoker and drinker feels so alive and alert that he/she no longer desires to poison himself or herself again with the bad habit.

-Fasting helps the heart. Fasting takes a load off our heart and our circulation. A fast improves our breathing and, by elimination of salt and less water, reduces tissue edema. This condition may even make it possible for us to sleep easier and better.

-Fasting reduces our extra pounds. Consistent and regular fasting periods help melt away our unwanted fat.

-Materially, fasting saves us money! Of course, with marketing drastically reduced we save on our food budget. With the extra saving we may want to share these blessings with charitable organizations. We may help feed the people of Africa, send an orphan to school, aid medical research projects and help rebuild people's lives.

-Spiritually, fasting draws us closer to God, helps us identify ourselves with the fasting experience of the Lord and to benefit from this through our union with him of heart and soul. We feel more drawn to prayer.

-Fasting strengthens character. The discipline, the self control and the humble experience of denying ourselves food makes our character stronger.

Fridays are fasting days in the monastery, and, when I was a young Sister, the older nuns would counsel me: "Fast well so that you can eat well. Eat well so you can fast well." You can really get to it both ways. So, for a sharper mind, lighter feeling, greater efficiency, clearer vision, health and deeper spirituality, let's fast!

Adapted from 'Sunday Examiner'

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Genesis 12:1-4

2 Timothy 1:8-10

Matthew 17:1-9

March 16, 2014

靈 修 生 活

我 們 在 這 裡 真 好

蔡 惠 民 神 父

據說耶穌升天後，有一天悄悄回到人間察看。在街上，祂看見一個爛醉如泥的人躺在路旁。耶穌說：「你為何讓自己的生命在酒精中浪費掉呢？」醉漢無奈地回答：「我原本是個盲人，耶穌把我治好了，如今我不知道要做甚麼」不久，耶穌在屋簷下又遇見一個老人彎著身子，坐在地上哭泣。當耶穌問他為何哭時，老人說：「我原來已經死了，耶穌使我死而復生，如今我能做甚麼？」耶穌感慨地說：「人們真是誤解了我對他們的召叫。」

今天的讀經指出：天主召叫了我們，叫我們去聽從祂的愛子，但聽從祂的愛子結果是甚麼？領洗加入教會為基督徒？在生活中為主的慈愛作見證？放下一切去服務祂的教會……無論答案是甚麼，天主都藉今天的讀經，邀請我們再前行一步。

為甚麼？因為在回應天主的旅程中，我們總希望能早日達到終點。特別在一些深刻而觸動的屬靈經驗過後，便以為目的地已經到達，只顧陶醉在這份滿全中而不再前進。難怪當年伯多祿、雅各伯和若望三位門徒在山上經驗了耶穌顯容後，便建議在那裡搭帳棚駐紮。試問信仰旅程中，有幾回可以目睹耶穌在光榮中與梅瑟和厄里亞，這兩位舊約法律和先知的代表相遇？相信任何人都希望時間就在這刻停頓下來。

此外，中國人有謂「五十而知天命」，好像說人到了中年，回首過去的軌跡，便可以預見將來的概略，換句話說，不用期待人生再有甚麼驚喜或變幻迂迴了。到了七十古來稀時，那就更不用談了。

不過，為亞巴郎來說，七十五歲才是另一段旅程的開始：「離開你的故鄉、你的家族和父家，往我指給你的地方去，我要使你成為一個大民族。」由於這一個召叫，亞巴郎帶同自己的妻子、侄兒、僕婢和財物，經歷了信仰的新頁。其間包括與侄兒羅特的不和，索多瑪和哈摩辣兩座城的被毀、羅特的化險為夷等。整整二十五年，最後才藉妻子撒辣年老得子才圓了這個夢。因此，亞巴郎的經驗提醒我們，天主的召叫是永不止息的，人生任何一個階段都可以是一個新的起點。

信仰有別於手工技藝，並無所謂退休，亦無所謂爐火純青，每天都是一個新的召叫和邀請，一份新的互信關係的建立。雖然這種似乎漫無終向的感覺，有時會令人缺乏安全感及氣餒，但從另一個角度來看，正正就是每天不會重覆的路程，使我們的生命充滿姿采，例如：一對結了婚五十年的夫妻，籍着一個夫婦懇談會，重新發現對方的優點；一個修女六十五歲的時候，在一次患病住院的經驗裡，才真正體味甚麼是愛和被愛；一個神父晉鐸二十五年後，感受耶穌對富少年的邀請，再一次在內心迴盪，因此，毅然放下自己「擁有」的一切，以一個赤子之心重新上路；一個專業人士，正於事業處於顛峰，前途無限的時候，灑脫地拋棄塵世一切，反璞歸真，努力開拓一片人間靜土……

雖然基督來是為摧毀死亡，並藉福音來彰顯不巧的生命，但這麼多的見證告訴我們，我們不用著急，將來復活光榮的肉軀，遠比現世的皮囊來得皎潔，我們用不著在這階段結棚駐紮，陶醉在當前美好的一刻。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 四 年 三 月 十 六 日

創 12-1-4; 弟後 1:8-10; 瑪 17:1-9