

Fasting: A Way to Turn to God

Kristopher W. Seaman

In the last five years, five weddings have occurred within my family: brothers, nieces, and a nephew have married. Each family was deeply grateful for the wedding, but remarked that the detailed preparations were demanding. Their preparations had to do with the ritual (the wedding ceremony) but also with processes that aimed to help the couple sustain a spiritual, holy, and deeply loving relationship.

You might wonder how preparing for a wedding relates to fasting.

When fasting is viewed as a preparation, it is seen in a more spiritual manner than simply “giving something up.” Some persons may view fasting as giving something up, and in a negative way, view the process as a trial. However, throughout the Church’s history, fasting has been a part of the preparation for both initiation (the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) as well as for repentance. Even today in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the elect (those persons who are seeking Christian initiation) join with the Christian community—or rather, we join them—in fasting during the liturgical season of Lent in preparation for their initiation at the Paschal Vigil on Holy Saturday night. Fasting in this regard has two characteristics: preparation and penitence.

During Lent the elect and those already baptized as Christian mark the period with fasting. This period prepares the elect for life as a Christian, and those already Christian are reminded that they, too, are always on the journey of conversion, that is, of turning away from all that is not of God, what we call sin, and turning toward God’s call and presence, which heals us of sin and brings us into a deeper life of holiness. In an ancient liturgical rite, this was ritually marked by the elect turning toward the west, the direction of sin, evil, the Devil, and spitting while renouncing these very things. Then, turning to the east, the rising sun, that is the Son, Christ Jesus, they would affirm their faith in God the Father, Christ Jesus, who rose to take away sin, and the Spirit, who cleanses us of



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sins and brings us into deeper union with the Father through Christ Jesus.

Lent, then, is when the parish community, and those seeking to become disciples within the Church, begin a period of purifying themselves so that God might liberate them for a deeper union with God. At the same time, all of us are called to deepen our life of holiness, both within the Church and during our daily lives, to follow God’s invitation to be holy in the world.

When fasting is viewed in a fuller context of preparation, it is not simply giving something up, but rather, the turning away from all that fractures our relationships with God, the Church, our families, and all humankind. Through the spiritual practice of fasting, then, we express our desire not to be held under the power of things and turn our attention toward growing in God’s call to holiness. During this Lent, we can ask ourselves how our fasting connects to preparing ourselves for deeper holiness and as a way of repentance, of turning from sin toward God’s gracious and merciful presence.

Fasting, then, is part of our process for deepening our discipleship.

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