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Those who fast and receive no benefit from it must have fasted in a wrong way; in this case, what is to blame is not fasting itself, but the method followed.

Fasting is a period of concentrated spiritual activity, a period of loving God and adhering to Him. As a result of this love, one who fasts is lifted above the level of the body and its concerns. He soars above worldly matters, to get a taste of the heavenly. It is a period of sacred feelings towards God, and ultimately, it harbours the feeling that one is close to, and familiar with, Him. It is a period of being spiritually content with the self and with God, and of standing against the Devil.

Days of fasting are specifically for spiritual energy, and are a period of storage.

From the depths of spirituality acquired, through fasting, one who fasts receives spiritual energy which supports him during his non-fasting days. Thus, he who is honest in his spiritual activity during Lent, for instance, receives a spiritual stock that strengthens him throughout the following fifty sacred days, during which there is neither fasting nor metanoias.

If one wants to fast in a spiritual fashion, one must bear in mind the following remarks:

1. Fasting must be spiritual in its target and motives.

It should not be performed as an obligation, for praise, or out of custom. In fasting, one must place the love of God above materialistic and bodily things, in order to allow the soul its chance.

2. Fasting should be a period of penitence and purity of heart.

In fasting, the person must lead a holy life, acceptable in the sight of God, in which he confesses his sins and repents, then partakes of the holy sacraments.

3. Fasting should be a period of spiritual nourishment, and it should follow a strong spiritual schedule.

While fasting, all the spiritual media should be taken care of, and spiritual, rather than bodily, matters should be concentrated upon. One should always place before oneself, not merely the kind of food for fasting, but the sanctity of fasting days and what is proper for them, so that one's spirit may become strengthened in them.

Fasting leads to the strength of the spirit, and the strength of the spirit leads to fasting.

In fasting there are virtues that are related to each other.

Fasting helps one to stay up late, because of the lightness of one's body, and staying up late leads to reading and prayer. Spiritual reading also helps one to pray, and it is a source of contemplation, which, in turn, strengthens prayer.

Fasting is related to metanoias, which lead to humility and the meekness of the heart. The humbling of the body, through fasting, also leads to a humbling of the soul.

Fasting is connected with virtues that are related to the purpose of fasting.

There is a fast, such as that of the Apostles, that prepares one for service, while another fast, such as that of Nineveh, aims at repentance. The purpose of some fasts, such as Esther's, aims at saving people, and there are those who fast for others, and their fast includes love, sacrifice, and cooperation. These are all fasts that are mingled with special virtues.

We should remember in our fast that the Lord Jesus Christ fasted while He was filled with the Spirit, but as for us, at least let us fast so that we may become filled with the Spirit.

Fasting should be accompanied by repentance.

Fasting days are sacred, and man lives them in holiness. During these days, the mind, heart and body must also be sacred. Fasting is a training period during which one attempts to approach God, while at the same time being pulled away by sin.

Therefore, one must escape from sin through repentance in order to draw one's self closer to God.

While fasting, the body abstains from food, and the soul abstains from every earthly lust, every worldly lust, and all lusts that pertain to the body. Thus, through repentance, one approaches God. Therefore, ask yourself: Are you on this track?

Without repentance, God does not accept your fast, and thus, you gain neither heaven nor earth, and you make yourself suffer in vain. If you want God to accept your fast, check yourself, as far as all your sins are concerned, and revoke them.

On this matter, we may take the clear example of the fast of Nineveh.

The Bible says that the people of Nineveh turned, "every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. " (Jonah3 :8) For this reason, God did not destroy them when He "...saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. " (Jonah3 :10) It was not said that, 'when He saw their ascetic garb or their fast,' but when he saw their repentance, which was a principal element in their fast.

In the Book of Joel, we see an example of repentance that accompanies fasting. The Lord addressed the people through His prophet, saying: "Turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments;

return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful" (Joel2 :13 12). It is clear here that fasting is accompanied by repentance and weeping. Therefore, fasting is not mere abstinence from food, but rather, it is the true yearning of the heart for God.

In his fast, Daniel, the prophet, presented the repentance of the whole population.

He fasted and confessed to God, saying, "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts... O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but unto us shame of face... O Lord, to us belongs shame of face to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You. " (Daniel9 :5-8)

Therefore, be reconciled with God in your fast.

Do not say: "How long will You forget me, O Lord : for ever?" (Psalm13 :1) You should rather say. `How long will I forget You, O Lord? For ever? Until when will I hide my face from You?'

Purify your souls then, and sanctify them. Prepare for a meeting with these days. Become ready by making God reside in your hearts, and not be merely abstaining from food. If you are in sin, be reconciled with God, and if you are reconciled with Him, deepen your love for Him.

If you have done away sinfulness during a fast, continue on in the same manner.

Repentance is not confined to fasting alone, but it is made fit through fasting. Man becomes trained in it, his heart is purified, and he keeps this purity as a lifestyle.

In all this, be ready to strive against the Devil.

Joshua, son of Sirach, told his son that if he set forward to serve God, he should prepare himself for all trials.

When the Devil sees your fast and repentance, he becomes envious of your spiritual acts.

Thus, he fights you to deprive you of the fruit of your labour, and seeks every trick to bring about your downfall, saying, `I shall not leave you until you give up.' Remember the words of Saint Peter who said, "Whom resist, steadfast in the faith. " (1Peter5 :9) Thus, fasting is a period of spiritual warfare, as was the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, in Matthew4 . It is also a period of triumph for him who shares it with Christ.

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