

FASTING: History, Practical Options

Headline: Fasting is a quintessential cornerstone of Lent. 40 Days of Lent offers every believer that Jesus was the word made flesh to confront their demons just as Jesus confronted His demons through His temptations. It is easy to forget Jesus was truly both man and God. His Demons are our demons. Fasting brings them into focus for confrontation. Can you fast from your most grave sin this Lent, and conquer it?

Objective: Repentance from sin is the focus of Lent. The objective of this topic is to reveal how, when and why fasting, modeled by Jesus, is essential to prayer, repentance to bring your temptations into focus so you can confront and conquer them (breakthrough).

Song Suggestion: 40 Days and 40 Nights

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Matthew 6:16 – 18 When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"

Please explain: *Jesus encourages believers to approach fasting—and by extension, all spiritual disciplines—with authenticity, integrity, and a focus on God. It reminds Christians that true righteousness is measured by the heart and devotion to God, not by public approval or outward appearances.*

Catechism 1434

"The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers (*of the Church sic*) insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others".

Saint: Catherine of Siena. Born in 1347 in Siena, Italy, Catherine was a Dominican tertiary who became a powerful spiritual leader in the 14th century. She is known for her visions, her role in mediating between the papacy and the Ghibelline faction, and her deep personal piety. Fasting was central to her spiritual practice — she often went without food for days, sometimes refusing to eat at all; a practice linked to the medieval phenomenon of anorexia mirabilis (holy anorexia). "Without mortifying the taste, it is impossible to preserve innocence, since it was by the indulgence of his appetite that Adam fell".

Vignette: — After a particularly bad week where he was emotionally battered and tired; it was a very tough week. He mused over why he had such crappy luck. Despite doing the things he loved he still felt out of sorts and tired. He played hard, he lived hard, he felt like he worked hard at all the good things life had to offer. But despite doing all the good things; still he felt that he got crappy outcomes. Yeah, he knew he lost focus sometimes, drank - a little too much, spent a little too much time on that sexy girl website. But hey, he said to himself, "I earned it." His wife pestered him to get straightened out. She and the kids were going to be OK because she and they were going to do Lent right. Starting with Ash Wednesday and then for 40 days they were all going to fast, pray and prepare for Easter. He said, yeah, do what you want but I am not. But then, in the wee hours of the morning, he began to feel like he had crossed the line. The next morning, he apologized to his wife, and they had a long talk about life; his life and his demons. She talked about how Jesus confronted His demons, and how fasting was essential repentance and with prayer and almsgiving, both precious to conversion away from sin. He knew his demons (repetitive sins), but how does he go about a fasting to conquer them?

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

1. Fasting is promoted by Jewish, Muslim, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and others. Why do you think fasting to be so potent approach to spiritual focus, preparation and prayer it is a “go to” practice among them?
2. What does it mean to “fast”?
3. How might a targeted fast be essential to breaking the chains of a repeat sin?
4. Have you witnessed anyone fast leading to a remarkable breakthrough?
5. What has been your most effective and impactful personal fast?
6. What might you do as a fast this Lent? Do you need a fast partner?
7. What do you think about helping your spouse and children fast, see Action planner!

Resources:

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year-and-calendar/lent/catholic-reflection-on-lenten-fasting>

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year-and-calendar/lent/catholic-information-on-lenten-fast-and-abstinence>

Action Plan:

1. Self: My personal Lenten Fast plan is:

2. Spouse: My Spouse and I will together fast by:

3. Children: My children’s fast plans are:

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