



Fasting, a Spiritual Discipline for Christians

“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast...” (Joel 2:15)

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free...” (Isaiah 58:6)

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (Matthew 5:6)

A Biblical Tradition

Fasting has a long biblical tradition. Particularly during times of national calamity, our biblical heroes called the nations to fast, sometimes as an act of repentance, at other times as an act of sacrifice and solidarity with those who are suffering. The best of the biblical tradition sees fasting not just as an empty ritual, but rather as a national or community action that leads to justice and peace.

The Example of Jesus

Standing in the same tradition Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. It was for him a conscious sacrifice in preparation for his public ministry. Depriving himself of food and other comforts would have enabled him to see life from the perspective of those who do not have. Is it surprising then, that his ministry was focused, in large part, towards those who were poor and suffering?

The Christian Tradition

Beginning with the early church fathers and desert monks, throughout the past 20 centuries Christians have developed a tradition of fasting. Many wrote about the value of fasting as a spiritual discipline. Today, fasting is a regular spiritual practice particularly in Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, while Evangelical Christians following in the path of Richard Foster’s *Spiritual Disciplines* are discovering its benefits.

Prayer and Reflection

Fasting and prayer go hand in hand. The meal time you have given up is a great time to set aside for prayer. When praying, begin by reading a Psalm like Ps. 63; 71; 91; 102. Continue your reflection upon how Jesus defined his mission (Luke 4:16-21) and how Isaiah calls us to link our fasting to action for justice (Isaiah 58:1-12). Get your body comfortable so that your mind and spirit can focus on God. Listen in silence to what God may bring to mind. Re-commit your life to engaging in bringing about God’s shalom on earth.

Sacrifice and Solidarity

Christian saints assert that when we voluntarily give up even a little of what we possess in abundance, we bring ourselves closer to God. Similarly, when we voluntarily sacrifice, we are more able to stand in solidarity with others: for example, with those who are poor around the world, with all those who are suffering in Iraq, including our own soldiers.

Fasting enables us to step back, even temporarily, from the social structures, pressures, and expectations that typically dominate our lives, fueling endless cycles of violence and consumption.

Significance of October 8th

Like the Biblical prophets of old, religious leaders today have proclaimed a National Day of Fasting on October 8th to call our nation from “Conquest to Community and Violence to Reverence.” It presents us with an opportunity for repentance, to offer a small sacrifice and to stand in solidarity particularly with those who suffer the consequences of the war in Iraq and make a commitment to stand for justice. It also allows us an opportunity to come together with neighbors of other religious communities in joint events of witness to peace.

For more information please click on the banner below or go the website of the Interfaith Fast to End the War in Iraq: <http://www.interfaithfast.org>



How to Fast (a few basic guidelines)

Fasting is the voluntary abstinence from food or drink or both. Whether you fast for one meal, one day, or an extended period of time, it is important to:

- consult your physician beforehand if you have a physical condition that could be affected by not eating.
- reduce your intake of food for one or two days prior to the fast. Avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- begin your fast with a positive attitude. Be aware of its roots in Biblical tradition. Stay focused on why you are fasting.
- drink 2-3 quarts of liquid during the day, especially water and fruit juices. It is common to feel nauseous or light-headed during the first day or two of a fast.
- break your fast with a light meal of fruit, vegetables, soup or bread.

Preparing for Interfaith Understanding

*May we know that you want us to care for one another as
those who know that they are sisters and brothers, members of the same family,
Your family, the human family.*

(From a prayer by Archbishop Desmond Tutu)

Fasting readies one's heart and mind, emotional and spiritual self, for experiences of compassion and understanding, open communication, sharing and solidarity. In Scripture, God not only speaks but listens, not only challenges, but builds. Fasting provides us an opportunity to quieten our hearts, so we can listen and build towards lasting relationships, and a just and peaceful world.



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**From Conquest to Community,
From Violence to Reverence**

An Interfaith Fast to End the War in Iraq

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