



23. February 2023

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 2: Wood for the fire of love

The holy journey of Lent also includes - whenever possible - bodily fasting and the renunciation of certain things.

In doing so, we exercise ourselves in an asceticism that is beneficial for the spiritual life. If practised properly, the words of one of the Lenten Prefaces become a reality:

"For through bodily fasting you restrain our faults,
raise up our minds, and bestow both virtue and its rewards,
through Christ our lord."

Voluntary renunciation favours a spiritual lifestyle. Here it is not in the foreground to procure all that we might need to live well; but to begin to restrain ourselves in order to concentrate on the essentials. This corresponds to Christian prudence, which calls us to opt for what is profitable on the way to the Lord and to leave behind what hinders it. Undoubtedly, a lifestyle largely oriented towards the sensual pleasures of life is an obstacle to a spiritual way of life. A fruitful asceticism, on the other hand, favours it.

Although physical fasting only acquires its spiritual value when it goes hand in hand with inner penance - i.e. conversion to God - it still has considerable value. It is not for nothing that the Church has insisted on this practice throughout the centuries. Only in recent decades have the rules of fasting been relaxed to such an extent that it hardly seems to have any relevance for our journey of following Christ. In any case, it is now up to Christians themselves to voluntarily impose fasting and certain ascetic restrictions on themselves.

It is worth remembering that for a long time it was common to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays on bread and water. Also in those monasteries which have preserved fasting and bodily penance, we still find various restrictions on the pleasures of the senses. These serve the same purpose as all beneficial forms of asceticism: they are to

strengthen the soul and to safeguard the freedom to deal with the things of this world without them acquiring too much influence or even dominion over us.

It should also be remembered that Jesus points out that certain kinds of demons can only be cast out by fasting and prayer (Mt 17:21). Fasting therefore has a special function in driving out demonic powers hostile to God.

Moreover, voluntary fasting is a sacrifice that God will certainly accept and use, if we offer it to Him in the right attitude. Let us remember that Jesus prayed and fasted for forty days in the wilderness before He began His public ministry.

So there are good reasons to consciously include fasting in our spiritual life. It must certainly be adapted to our life situation, and it must not be exaggerated in such a way as to render us incapable of fulfilling the tasks entrusted to us.

The statement that "*God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Cor 9:7), the one who does these deeds in secret, without seeking the recognition of men (Mt 6:17-18), also applies to fasting.

Let us not fall into delusions when it comes to fasting, believing that we might suffer a loss in our quality of life, or that we would be unable to do it, that we might even fall ill, or that fasting was only important in the past. Let us disregard the many objections that our fallen nature raises to every sacrifice we make.

If we want the holy journey towards the Lord's Resurrection to become a blazing fire, burning for living and proclaiming God's love, then we can consider bodily fasting and sacrifices as "good wood", which feeds the flame of love and keeps it alive.

Meditation on the first reading of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2022/03/03/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2021/02/18/>