



28. March 2025

MEDITATIONS FOR LENT

Fasting and vigils

Having talked about prayer and having looked at three very effective forms of spiritual combat - the prayer of the heart, the Holy Rosary and Eucharistic adoration - we now return to that little meeting of some of the Desert Fathers around St Anthony Abbot with which we began our Lenten meditations. It was from this conversation that we drew the concept of 'discretion', which means 'discernment of spirits'. Inspired by this concept, we looked at the situation in the Church and in the world. As a conclusion, it became clear that the faithful must enter into the spiritual battle because the leaders of the Church are spreading grave errors.

In this context, I would like to recall the series on "The Five Wounds of the Church" (<https://en.elijamission.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-5-Wounds-of-the-Church.pdf>), which will help us to understand more deeply the existential crisis of the Church. It is important that the faithful wake up and realise that they cannot simply "go with the flow" and follow the direction set by the current hierarchy without being dragged down by its errors.

A few days ago, Auxiliary Bishop Athanasius Schneider, one of the few who has openly criticised certain decisions of the current pontificate, urged Francis, after his return from hospital, to "retract some acts which he did in his pontificate, some documents, some words with which he made confusion and or undermined the clarity of the divine faith". In an interview with radio host Joe McClane¹, Monsignor Schneider explained how this necessary correction could be made. Francis should publish a document restoring the truth of the faith and condemning the most widespread errors in the Church today. This is necessary, he said, so that with his own pen he can correct the confusions and ambiguities that have arisen during his pontificate.

This would include, according to Bishop Schneider, the explicit retraction of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* and the complete retraction of the "blasphemy of *Fiducia Supplicans*," in which Francis authorized the blessing of same-sex couples.

¹ <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/bishop-schneider-urges-pope-francis-to-retract-texts-undermining-the-faith/>

Bishop Schneider also states that 'the infamous Abu Dhabi document must be "clearly retracted" in order to preserve the authenticity of the Catholic faith, along with the synodal process and the recent three-year extension approved by Pope Francis.'

Since its publication in 2019, Bishop Athanasius Schneider has repeatedly criticised the document on human fraternity signed in Abu Dhabi. In particular, he reproved the sentence stating that "The pluralism and the diversity of religions (..) are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings", because such a statement "clearly contradicts to divine revelation, it directly contradicts God's first commandment, which is always valid: *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"*. The Abu Dhabi document "contradicts the entire Gospel".

As far as the content is concerned, I fully agree with Bishop Schneider. However, although all things are possible for God, and therefore I cannot exclude it, I do not believe that the leader of the Church would issue such a document or publicly withdraw it. Rather, I have the impression that he is consolidating the errors I mentioned. Therefore, I think that we must continue to prepare ourselves for the struggle, and to this end we will pay attention to what the Desert Fathers propose to us.

Let us remember that the conversation among them revolved around the question of which virtue or practice could protect a monk from all the wiles of the devil and lead him safely to the summit of perfection. Some argued in favour of fasting and vigils, in order to unite oneself more quickly to God with an agile spirit.

Today, physical fasting has almost completely disappeared from the official life of the Church, and with it certain aspects associated with fasting. It should be made clear that the Old Testament prophets never criticised fasting as such, but rather the fact that it was not practised with the right attitude. If fasting and vigils are not aimed at holiness in general, such practices do not contribute to the growth of Christian virtues.

One of the prefaces to Lent describes it very well: "*For you will that our self-denial should give you thanks, humble our sinful pride, contribute to the feeding of the poor, and so help us imitate you in your kindness.*"

Here we are shown the right motivation: conscious renunciation and moderation in the consumption of food are intended to strengthen our spiritual powers and also to open our hearts so that we can more easily recognise the needs of others and serve them.

The Desert Fathers are undoubtedly right when they say that through fasting and vigils our spirit becomes more agile and can be more easily united with God. When we think less about food and the enjoyment of certain exquisite delicacies, when we detach ourselves more from our sensual desires, our spirit becomes freer to rise to God. Surely this is what the Fathers had in mind when they recommended the practice of fasting. Night vigils are also fruitful for our spirit, allowing us to take advantage of the silence of the night to pray to God in a more contemplative way, and thus to unite ourselves more easily with Him. In all this, it is important to keep in mind the "discretion" suggested by Saint Anthony Abbot, in order to avoid excesses. Fasting and moderating our appetites does not mean going hungry, but practising a renunciation which, far from harming us, strengthens us.

Tomorrow we will continue to look at other aspects of fasting and vigils, paying particular attention to Jesus' words that certain kinds of demons can only be cast out by fasting and prayer (Mt 17:21). It is important to know this for spiritual warfare!