



29. March 2025

## MEDITATIONS FOR LENT

### Other aspects of fasting

In yesterday's meditation we had begun to reflect on fasting and vigils as spiritual means of becoming more united to God, or as the Desert Fathers around St. Anthony used to say, "to unite ourselves more quickly to God with an agile spirit". A more intimate union with the Lord is an essential help to counter the devil's insidious attacks and to be prepared for spiritual warfare.

Today, let us look more closely at the subject of fasting.

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.

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.

But it is necessary to recognise or rediscover the value of fasting. Indeed, great care must be taken that all the treasures that the Church has accumulated since the time of Jesus and even since the Old Testament are not sacrificed for the sake of an adaptation to the modern spirit.

Fortunately, more and more believers are rediscovering the practice of fasting, which strengthens them for the spiritual battle. Even if one does not feel able to fast on bread

and water twice a week, it is possible to practice other forms of abstinence or to fast in a more moderate way. For example, you can choose one day of the week (e.g. Friday) and fast only until three o'clock in the afternoon, the hour of the Lord's death. Among Eastern Christians it is common to abstain from fat, dairy products, etc. The important thing is to do it with the right attitude and to understand that fasting and vigils are valuable practices, although they must be moderated by the virtue of "discretion", as St Anthony Abbot emphasised in his conversation with the other Fathers.

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.

This is a special message for us in the context of spiritual warfare, because by establishing the relationship between fasting and casting out demons, Jesus offers us additional help in the battle against them. The Lord does not specify what kind of demons He is referring to, but it could be a higher rank in the hierarchy of fallen angels. The grace of fasting is activated to fight against them.

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.

If we are attentive, we will discover more and more treasures in our Holy Church that will help us to walk resolutely on our spiritual path and to face the inevitable battle in the right way. As I have said many times, this is especially important at this time when we are called to resist the anti-Christian spirit that has almost completely taken over the world and has largely infiltrated the Church. Fasting and vigils, practised with

"discretion" but also with determination, are a powerful weapon to weaken the forces of evil and to make the light of the Lord shine more brightly.

There is no reason to fear these practices. Rather, we must seize the opportunities that present themselves and join spiritually with those who do not shrink from today's challenges, but face them with God's grace.