



Balta Lelija

20. February 2026
LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT
Day 3: “The Benefits of Fasting”

Today, on the third day of our Lenten journey, the readings introduce us to the themes of fasting and loving our enemies.

Fasting—and by this we mean, first and foremost, bodily fasting, which was very common in the Church in times past—is a very good and beneficial practice for our spiritual life in following Christ. Without a doubt, it is a sacrifice pleasing to God if it is accompanied by the struggle for holiness in general. The reading from the Book of Isaiah points out the frequent abuses that displeased God in the fasting practiced by His people. It is easy to understand that this practice can only be pleasing in His eyes when it is done with a sincere heart.

“Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and thou takest no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am. “If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday’. (Is 58:3–10)”

We see, then, that fasting becomes “true fasting” when it is combined with works of mercy and a change of life—that is, conversion. Fasting should help us open our hearts to the needs of others and to share with them the goods we voluntarily renounce, both materially and spiritually. On the other hand, the self-discipline involved in fasting strengthens us to face the spiritual struggles we must wage as disciples of the Lord. Last but not least, Jesus lets us know that certain demons can only be cast out through prayer

and fasting (cf. Mk 9:29), meaning that in this way we can participate in the authority of the Lord. In addition, voluntary deprivation gives us greater inner freedom and reduces our attachment to earthly realities.

In short, fasting produces many good fruits, as long as it is practiced with the right attitude.

It should be remembered that fasting on bread and water, as well as other forms of bodily fasting, has been practiced in Christianity throughout the centuries. It would be very desirable for this almost forgotten treasure in the Catholic Church to be revived. In fact, this is already happening in certain groups, communities, or individual faithful, and there are many reasons to continue rediscovering it.

Today's Gospel introduces us to levels of spiritual life that might seem unattainable. Jesus addresses His disciples—and therefore also us—and says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5:43–48).

How can we understand this exhortation, which goes far beyond what our human nature is capable of? Perhaps with our understanding and our will we might be able not to hate our enemies and to treat them with dignity, but to love them? This is not possible with our own strength. For this, we need another strength that does not come from ourselves—namely, the grace of God, which is absolutely indispensable even to desire to embark on this path of divine love that overcomes everything.

The key to understanding this discourse of Jesus lies in the last sentence: *“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

Love of one's enemy is part of God's perfection and can only be imitated with His grace. Under His loving influence, we learn to see others through His eyes. To the extent that our hearts are transformed by grace, we become capable of performing these acts of supernatural love. As a first step, it may help us to think that we would not even wish our worst enemy to be tormented by demons in hell for all eternity. This will motivate

us to intercede for him so that he may convert in time.

Our Lenten journey aims to prepare us for the supreme feast of Easter and to enlarge our hearts, making them more capable of love. Fasting practiced with the right attitude and the desire to love as God loves will accelerate this journey.

Today's meditation flower is as follows: Adopt fasting in our lives according to our possibilities and ask God for the grace to love our enemies.

Meditation on the reading of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/2019/03/08/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/2022/03/04/>