

## Fasting is an Act of Love

Christian life is love, first and foremost, the love of God and then the love of the neighbor.

*“Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”* (Mark 12:13-31)

All our strife, in essence, is a practical expression of this love to God and to the neighbor.

Our worship is primarily driven by love, whether it is: Prayer, Fasting, Asceticism, or Praise. These are all practical expressions of the love of God which is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. (Romans 5:5) Additionally, loving our neighbor should take shape in many different practical ways: Alms giving, Sacrifice, forgiveness, longsuffering, listening, respect, fellowship... This is practical love.

The Holy Church teaches us that fasting is fundamental act of worship... An act of love.

And since the beginning of the Church, fasting has been having a prominent place in its spiritual life, as an act of love for the Holy Trinity. The Church received it personally from Jesus Christ, who fulfilled, blessed it, and handed it to us as a weapon for victory, a means to transcendence, and an entrance to the new life.

Since its beginning, the Church has been clear in its dogma about the importance of integrating the work of Christ in her body, such that they become living acts in her members.

The Lord Jesus did not get baptized for His own sake, neither was He crucified, nor did he fast for forty days for His own self. The work of Christ is a remarkable force capable in itself, and has become a source for our salvation and our new life. Nonetheless, this power is not transferred to us until we live it and practice it in the Church. In other words, this power doesn't transfer to us automatically just by our mere faith and acceptance of the person of Christ, but rather we must enter into a living fellowship with Him through the Holy Sacraments of the Church.

We die and rise with Him in baptism; we are anointed with the Myron so we become a sanctuary for His Holy Spirit. We fast with Him so that we join Him in His passion; we become disciplined in our thoughts to transcend in the spirit. We partake of the bread of life, his body and blood, so that we become sanctified and we abide in Him and Him in us.

We take the life-giving acts of Christ in us through the living fellowship in the Holy Church, such that Christ Himself abides in us.

### Preparation (Fasting-Prayer-Alms giving)

+ With repentance and through fasting we are liberated from lust, indulging the body, and softness. It strengthens our hands to be lifted up for prayer and to be stretched out for doing good and charitable deeds. These are the delicious fruits in the life of the repentant person. The church puts an emphasis, to the repentant, on how important to focus on inner life in secret through taming the body and controlling it.

+ The Church also offers to us the concept of weaning oneself from the world as a fundamental fact in the life of those who live with God *“Thy kingdom come”* (Matthew 6:10). A person weaned from the world desires the heavenly kingdom and asks for its coming in the Lord's Prayer.

+ The great lent is a fantastic opportunity to be adorned with the virtues of giving, laying down one's life, and the acts of mercy. When a man strives through fasting and prayer, he rushes with his heart to give alms, thus he gives his bread, that he saved in fasting, to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing. (Ezekiel 18:7)

+ The purpose of fasting is purity of heart and beholding God as a father accepting our love. Therefore, the enemy of God makes every effort to spoil this work by the slipping of boasting and the praising of others to us, so our love towards God drifts away from him and fasting becomes a formality without spirit.

+ We shouldn't fast for the sake of fasting, nor to deprive ourselves, but rather to practice self control and the release of the heart to the heavenly life.

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