

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Feb 15th 2013

“Why do we fast, and you do not see it?
afflict ourselves, and you take no note of it?”

Do you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?

Then Isaiah sets them - and us - straight about true fasting:

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking every yoke;
Sharing your bread with the hungry,
sheltering the oppressed and the homeless;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own.

In one of the most beautiful lines in scripture, Isaiah delivers God's message:

When we act justly - when these are the sacrifices we make in love for those in need -

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,

and your wound shall quickly be healed;

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer,

you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!

This reading - and its second half tomorrow - are a great reflection on how we might decide to fast during these six weeks of Lent. Of course, we will also want to fast from food on the Fridays of Lent. In addition to that, we can ask ourselves, Are there concrete acts of compassion and justice which can become a part of my Lenten journey? After all, aren't these the changes in our hearts which will lead us to deeper conversion? The fasting from food can become the preparation - our experience of surrender of "our own pursuits" and can heighten our awareness and prepare for our change of heart regarding those in need around us.

Sometimes, the change in our attitude, in our compassion and love, begins close to home - loving our family members better. Today and every Friday of Lent could be special days of practicing special care for those we need to love with more appreciation and sensitive, thoughtful care. That love and compassion can then spread out, allowing us to examine our consciences about how we can act more justly in our hearts, in our choices, in our generosity.

This Lent can become a time in which our hearts are drawn closer to our Lord's own heart - and the blessing he promises us: if we die to ourselves we will find ourselves.

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