

## Embarking Upon the Great Fast

Let us fast now so that we will have no need of fasting later. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the Rich Man was accustomed to fine dining, wearing luxurious clothing, and having every so-called need satisfied. At his gate was the beggar Lazarus, who lived in want and deprivation. When each died, Lazarus entered the Heavenly Kingdom and the Rich Man was tormented in Hades, so parched that he begged the Lord to allow Lazarus only to dip his finger in water and let a drop fall into his mouth and give some satisfaction to his tongue. Lazarus fasted during his earthly life so that he would not need to in the hereafter. The Rich Man neglected fasting now, but experienced Eternity as a torture because he did not prepare himself to receive the Love of God.

Let us fast from earthly pleasures now so that we will not have to experience a far more extreme “fasting” from God’s Love in Eternity. Because they did not fast when told to, Adam and Eve ate of the Fruit of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and were expelled from Paradise. Outside Paradise, they were forced to fast from the paradisiacal nourishment they enjoyed in the Garden. They gave up the Garden for the cemetery. They gave up the Divine Fruit hanging from the trees of Paradise and discovered beads of sweat hanging from their brow after labor. They gave up painlessness for sorrow. Inheritors of their Fall, it is through their path of pain and labor that we will prepare our souls to receive God’s Love through humility and meekness. Let us do without the pleasures of this world so that we can prepare for the Eternal World. Fr. Sebastian Dabovich of Blessed Memory instructs:

Do not flee from the difficulty of fasting, but set up hope against the trial, and you will obtain the desired abstinence from food. Repeat to yourself the words of the pious: "Fasting is bitter, but paradise is sweet; thirst is tormenting, but the spring, from which he who drinks will thirst never again, is at hand." The body is importunate, but the immaterial soul is much stronger—strength is dead, but nigh is the resurrection. Let us say to our much-craving stomach what the Lord said to the tempter: *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God* (Luke 4:4). Fasting is not hunger, but a little abstinence from food, not an inevitable punishment, but a voluntary continence, not a servile necessity, but a free selection of the wise. Pray and you will be strengthened; call, and a prompt helper will come to your assistance. (from “Thoughts on Fasting and Temperance”)

We have before us a fast-free week so that we will not take pride in our spiritual labors like the Pharisee, whose disciplines and fastings did nothing to soften him to receive God’s love. We are not spiritual men and women like our predecessors. Let us, instead, become beggars at the gate like Lazarus, taking satisfaction in meager scraps and mercy now, so that we will rejoice with Lazarus and the Publican in the Heavenly Banquet in the Age to come.

Fr. Daniel  
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