

## Some thoughts on Fasting

*“Eat. Let the sin be on me!”*

In a company of friends we often hear someone who does not fast saying with self-sacrifice to another one who is fasting: *“Eat. Let the sin be on me”*. As if fasting is a tax that can be paid by a partner.

This attitude shows the **legalistic** understanding we have about our relationship with the Church. Crime and punishment: law, offense, debt, sentence, redemption. This attitude is mainly due to the middle-age like barbarity that dominated our country, especially after 1821. The canons of the Church are demoted to infertile laws. The agony that they not be violated becomes predominant because of the fear of the consequences which are to follow. The laws of the State may be oppressive, but we tolerate them so that society may function. **The laws of the Church, the Canons, exist in order to heal us. Whoever tries to the best of his/her abilities to adhere to their spiritual dimension earns the healing of his/her whole existence; whoever is not totally successful, she/he at least wins the healing of his/hers conscience.** The *“philanthropic”* adjustment to the social realities is not a right approach. Deleting something because few or many do not adhere to it is wrong. This so called realistic attitude may destroy sometimes the possibility for repentance. The rules of the Church point to the straight road. The economy of the Church permits “some” deviations so that a woman/man’s life may slowly reach equilibrium, finding strength in repentance.

Think of an athlete as she/he is training. At that time, a friend appears and encourages her/him to “go out for a drink”. The friend insists that she/he will take responsibility. If the athlete follows, the training fails, and the chances of a medal quickly disappear. What can one hope from this self-sacrifice of the friend who is willing to take responsibility? The case with fasting is quite similar. It is not a matter of sin/offense; it is a matter of loss of opportunity for training and success.

**Fasting is a kind of training. The Church calls it an exercise.** If the exercise is interrupted, its purposes will not be attained. The purpose, of course, **is to heal, to cleanse the passions, to illuminate the mind, to reach theosis.** Fasting, however, **it is not a championship.** It should not be made absolute; neither should all efforts simply aim towards the strict adherence to its rules. Continuous improvement is essential, but the focus should be on the ultimate purpose; not on perfecting the means to the purpose. That was the mistake of the Pharisees. They elevated the means to the status of purpose. The more I fast, the better I am; I adhere to the rules, therefore God owes me. Here, pride negates all effort. **The means should bring inspiration; instead, it drowns the whole existence in the abyss of self-righteousness.**

In addition to their regular training, all athletic teams (football, soccer, basketball, etc.) also have their annual training camps to prepare them for the season. Such is the Great Holy Lent for the Christian. She/he trains spiritually to prepare for the year. *The Church champions are the ascetics. It is to be understood that the training of the hermit is different that that of the “untrained” lay person. The former takes the steep path directly to the top; the latter takes the smooth, winding road that leads slowly to the top. Both are headed to the same peak. The purpose is the same for all.* It is the attainment of the *“in the icon”*, the realization of the *“in the likeness”*.

In times when economic factors determine the relations between states, the Church offers in its *economy* the opportunity of theosis to the “untrained”. It compassionately offers to the novice the opportunity to commence without hiding the prize, which is the cornerstone, the immovable foundation, Christ the God-Man.

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