

Fasting and Feasting

Lent should be more than a time of fasting. It should also be a joyous season of feasting. Lent is a time to fast from certain things and feast on others. It is a season to turn to God:

Fast from judging others; feast on the Christ dwelling in them.
Fast from emphasis on differences; feast on the unity of all life.
Fast from apparent darkness; feast on the reality of light.
Fast from thoughts of illness; feast on the healing power of God.

Fast from words that tear down; feast on phrases that build up.
Fast from discontent; feast on gratitude.
Fast from anger; feast on patience.
Fast from pessimism; feast on optimism.

Fast from worry; feast on divine providence and order.
Fast from complaining; feast on appreciation.
Fast from negatives; feast on affirmatives.
Fast from unrelenting pressures; feast on unceasing prayer.

Fast from hostility; feast on non-resistance.
Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness.
Fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others.
Fast from discouragement; feast on hope.

Fast from facts that depress; feast on truths that uplift.
Fast from lethargy; feast on enthusiasm.
Fast from suspicion; feast on trust.
Fast from thoughts that weaken; feast on promises that inspire.

Fast from shadows of sorrow; feast on the sunlight of serenity.
Fast from idle gossip; feast on purposeful silence.
Fast from doing; feast on being.
Fast from being in control; feast on surrendering.

Pick three that speak to your heart and work on those this Lent. Pray about them. Ask for specific graces to transform you, like: "God, I ask for the grace to feast on phrases that purify others and myself, and for help to abstain from words that tear down." God always answers prayers for grace, but be open because God often does not answer them in the way we expect.

A Contemplative Prayer Walk

Creation itself, the physical universe, can provide a pathway to God. When we regard reality with awe, we open ourselves to appreciating the traces of the divine artist in the handiwork of God. We can often hear God speaking through the created world if we will but be open and attentive to listen and see. Jesus reflected on God's creation and gained insights which he included in his teaching (e.g. the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, the fig tree, and the chicks).

The following is a simple prayer exercise which invites us to deliberately slow down and open ourselves to God. Allow thirty (30) minutes for the actual walk.

Go for a walk alone, deliberately slowing down your pace. Take a few deep breaths.

Now open yourself to God, asking God to speak to you either concerning a specific question or concern you may have or about something God wants to show you.

Keep open to the outside world rather than simply mulling things over in your mind. Use your senses to become aware of what is going on around you. Use your eyes to look at things close up and at a distance. Become aware of shapes, colors, textures. Look at things in relation to each other.

Does anything particularly attract your attention? If so, pause and take it in. Is God saying something through it?

Use your ears and really listen, both to sounds and to silence. Be aware of sounds going on inside yourself—hear your inner self but then move out again.

Use touch to become aware of different textures—the bark of a tree, the earth, grass, a wall. Again, if something attracts you, pause and explore it. Become aware of anything God might be saying.

You may want to bring back something you have picked up—a stone, a twig, a shell, etc.