

God's First Command to Humans

"You shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17)



Fasting is one of the world's oldest religious practices, yet in our modern society, where instant gratification has become the norm, fasting is often reduced to an afterthought, if it is considered at all.

In St. Basil's first Homily on Fasting, he recognizes that God's first command to us as humans was to fast. "You shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). According to St Basil, because we did not abstain, we were banished from paradise. So let us fast that we may return to it. (First Homily on Fasting cir. fourth century).

In his Second Homily on Fasting, St. Basil builds on this message. Fasting properly orders the appetites of our body to the good of our soul: "The more you deny the flesh, the more you render the soul radiant with spiritual health." Threads of this ancient teaching wind through the centuries to the present day, offering a way for us to feed the soul which is 'constantly aching for the mercy and goodness of God.

Are we feeding this ache or letting our souls starve? (Fr Blake Britton, St Basil the Great on Fasting, Word on Fire, 2020)

Dear Lord, help me to practice self restraint so that I may grow closer to you. Let the hunger and thirst I experience while fasting, remind me that what I truly long for is you.

Why fast?

- Fasting aids the soul in acquiring maturity
- Practicing self restraint helps build patience and supports wise decision making
- The more we practice abstinence, the more mature we become
- Fasting is "the companion of sobriety and the craftsman of self-control"
- Fasting strengthens our self control away from immature impulses

Making Lent Meaningful for the Whole Family

The fasting norms are not obligatory for those under 18. However, that does not mean that children cannot fast, in an age appropriate way. Having almost everything we need and want at our fingertips can cause us to forget how much we need God. Fasting reminds us that God is the provider of everything.

The difficulty of sacrifice brings our attention more directly towards Christ. Feeling the pain or discomfort of abstinence reminds us of what Jesus gave up for us out of love. Children can experience these things without participating in a traditional fast from food. Communicating to our children why we fast in order to help them participate in Lent, is a wonderful gift that we can give them.

As you journey through Lent, consider fasting as a family. Then, consider discussing some of the following questions with your child:

*Has fasting been hard? Have you missed the thing you gave up?
What is God teaching you through it?*

Here are some ideas for your child to do as a fast:

- No sweets for a week
- No gadgets for anything, but school
- Keep some of their favorite clothes in the closet for a week
- Share one of their treasures with a friend or sibling for a week

