

Fasting before Feasting



March 2012

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This year, consider fasting not only as a Lenten discipline in preparation for the feast of Easter, but as a time-honoured means of growing closer to God and neighbour...
writes Marilyn Rodrigues

Mar 2012



This Month...

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- Mo 19 St Joseph,
Husband of Mary
- Su 25 **Lent 5:
From Death
comes Life**
- Mo 26 The Annunciation

Are you doing any fasting this Lent?



A good friend of mine who is Coptic orthodox is undergoing his annual great Lenten fast – which is mainly a very light vegan diet until their Easter Sunday. Each year my family is invited to his parents' house for their Easter lunch with family and friends. It is a true feast around a table groaning with piles of gorgeous food and it's always a very joyous occasion. I'm grateful that I get to enjoy the feast with them without having to do the very demanding fast with them!

Fasting has always been an important part of the spiritual life in the Christian and Jewish traditions, viewed as an indispensable pillar of the spiritual life alongside prayer and almsgiving.

For many it has been a highly-prized means of growing in every kind of virtue – a short cut to holiness if you will.

But largely in the West we have forgotten that fasting is for our own physical, mental and spiritual health and to promote concern for people who are forced to live more simply than ourselves. Many of us have also forgotten the joy of a feast, when most of the foods we like to eat and other consumer goods are plentiful or at least a short drive away.

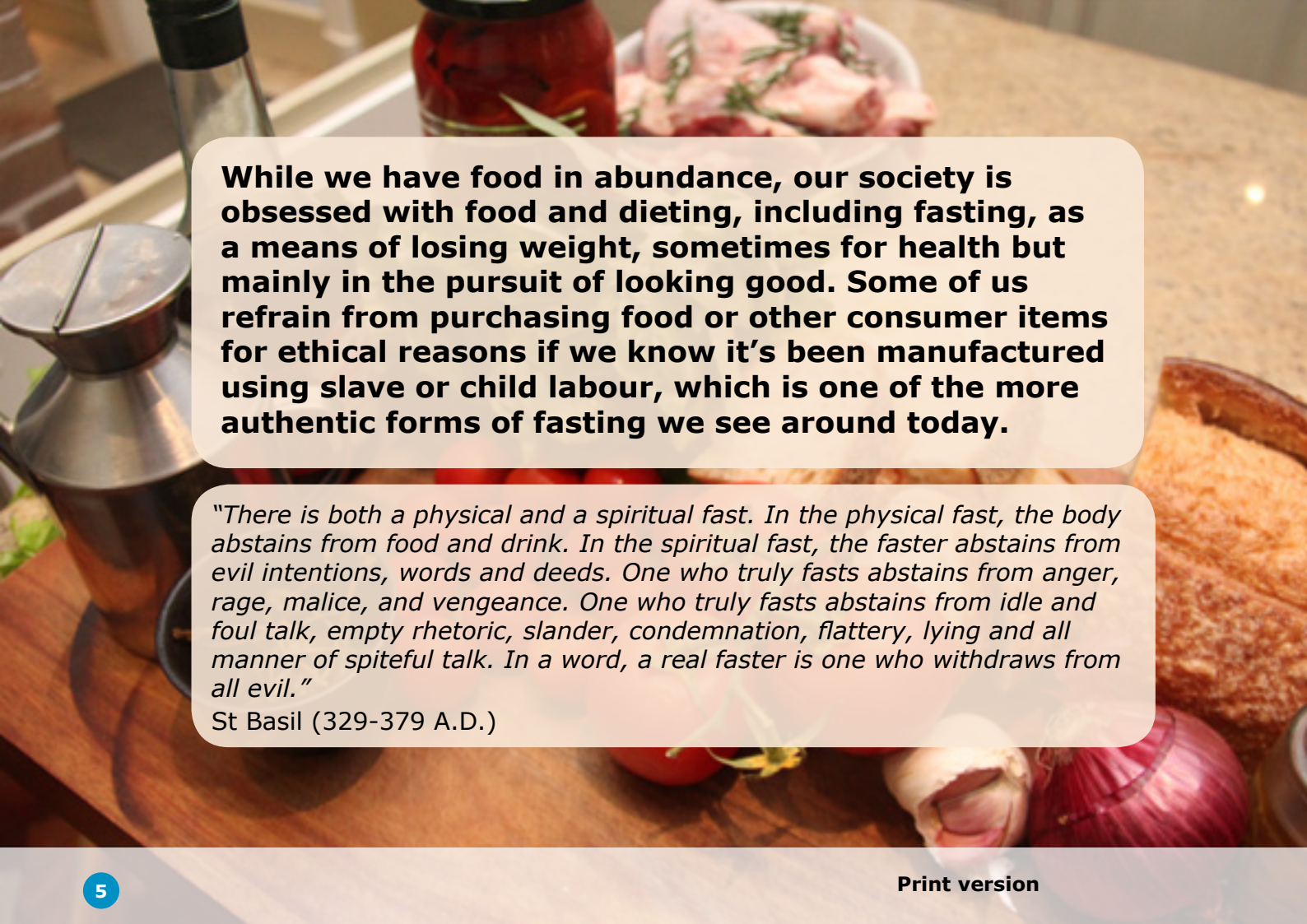


Through hundreds of thousands of years of evolution humans were hard-wired to not only survive but thrive through cycles of fasting and feasting. Winter and spring were lean seasons when crops were limited or just being planted and grown, while summer and autumn were times of plenty. Hunters and gatherers would have their own seasons of supply and scarcity which needed to be accommodated for.

Now with our society's rising affluence and a global economy we have constant availability of whatever we want to eat whenever we want it. At the same time more than half of us are overweight or obese with a consequent rise in problems such as diabetes and heart disease.

One theory even links an increase in immunological disorders such as Crohn's disease with the drastic change in the eating habits of developed countries within the past two generations.





While we have food in abundance, our society is obsessed with food and dieting, including fasting, as a means of losing weight, sometimes for health but mainly in the pursuit of looking good. Some of us refrain from purchasing food or other consumer items for ethical reasons if we know it's been manufactured using slave or child labour, which is one of the more authentic forms of fasting we see around today.

"There is both a physical and a spiritual fast. In the physical fast, the body abstains from food and drink. In the spiritual fast, the faster abstains from evil intentions, words and deeds. One who truly fasts abstains from anger, rage, malice, and vengeance. One who truly fasts abstains from idle and foul talk, empty rhetoric, slander, condemnation, flattery, lying and all manner of spiteful talk. In a word, a real faster is one who withdraws from all evil."

St Basil (329-379 A.D.)

The Eucharist & Freedom

Monsignor Charles Murphy, author of *The Spirituality of Fasting* distinguishes total fasting from food and drink for a limited time in preparation for the Eucharist, from partial fasting such as that prescribed during Lent, which is “penitential and therapeutic”.

He recommends regular partial fasting by skipping one meal every week of the year, using that time to pray instead, and giving the savings to a charity. “It means we don’t have to structure our whole day, every day around eating. We have the freedom to create a new structure to organise our time,” he told Catholic TV recently.

In other words, partial fasting can raise our minds from our monotonous routines of eating and working to other things we deem important for our life and time.

Talk about it

1. Have you ever fasted before? How did it affect you spiritually?
2. “Without fasting, there can be no feasting”. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

The Lenten Observance

Prayer, almsgiving and fasting are the three pillars of Lenten observance, and it's not too late to start if you haven't already, or begin again if you've fallen off the wagon!

Fasting, as it's traditionally prescribed by the Church for healthy adults during Lent, usually means giving up meat (abstaining) on the Fridays, and fasting or eating very lightly plus abstaining on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

We may also choose to give up things such as self-pity, criticism, blaming, gossiping or a favourite activity or habit, while feasting on being kinder, more generous, more thoughtful or more cheerful.



"Fasting of the body is food for the soul."

St John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.)

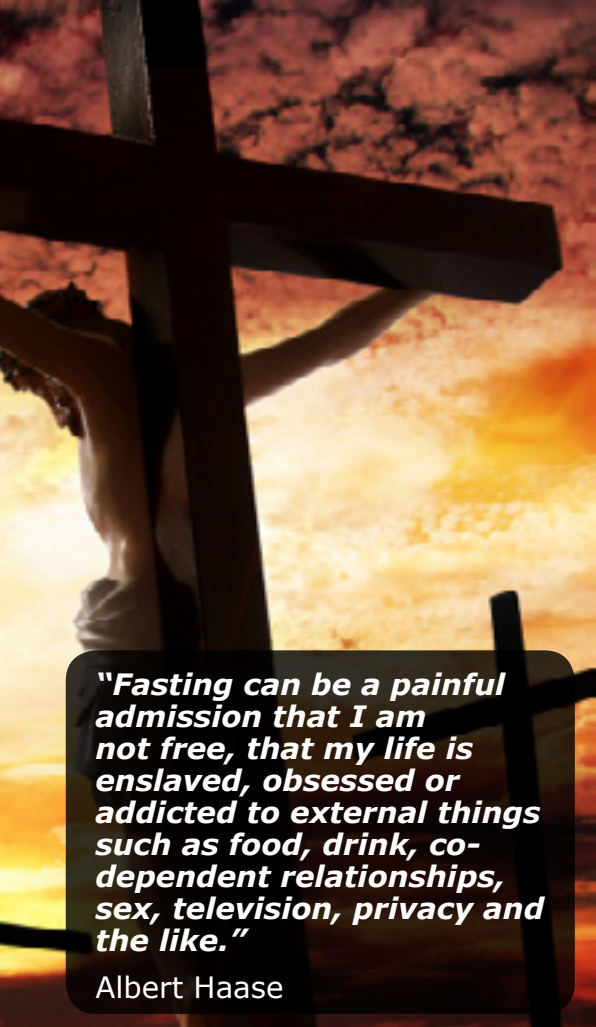
Fasting, Ego and Humility

Through fasting we learn to give credit to the one who is responsible for the times of feasting – God.

It's not about white-knuckled self-discipline so much as getting our own ego out of the way and making room for others, especially God. It's recognising that everything God gives us is good and meant to be enjoyed, but not without remembering that they are gifts from God, that we don't enjoy what we can and forget about God.

Fasting in any area of our personal life fosters humility and gratitude, virtues which brings us much closer to God and to each other. And the time of feasting then brings us closer to each other as well in celebration, renewed and refreshed by the experience of our fasting.

Authentic feasting is a joyful communion with each other and with God, acknowledging God as supreme while enjoying the good things of life.



"Fasting can be a painful admission that I am not free, that my life is enslaved, obsessed or addicted to external things such as food, drink, co-dependent relationships, sex, television, privacy and the like."

Albert Haase

Suggestions for Fasting and Feasting

Fast from discontent; feast on thankfulness.

Fast from worry; feast on trust.

Fast from anger; feast on patience.

Fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others.

Fast from unrelenting pressures; feast on unceasing prayers.

Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness.

Fast from discouragement; feast on hope.

Fast from media hype; feast on the honesty of the Bible.

Fast from idle gossip; feast on purposeful silence.

Fast from problems that overwhelm; feast on prayer that undergirds.

Anonymous

Sources and Links:

Australia's obesity rates out of control.
www.news.com.au/national

Overweight and Obesity.
www.aihw.gov.au

The Case for the Restoration of Fasting in Religious Life.
www.religious-vocation.com/fasting

Holiness and Fasting; interview with Mons Charles Murphy.
www.youtube.com

Albert Haase Quote.
dailychristianquote.com

Spiritual Spring Clean

By Francine & Byron Pirola

Lent is a wonderful season in the Church calendar - time set aside to renew and prepare ourselves to receive the fullness of life in the resurrection. It's a time for a bit of a spiritual 'spring-clean'. After all, the word 'Lent' means 'springtime'. Just as a 'spring-clean' in our homes gives us a renewed sense of order and purpose, a spiritual spring-clean lifts our spirits, sweeps out the bad habits and creates space in our lives for God.

Check out the website for Spiritual Spring-cleaning tips and the Top Ten Lenten promises.



Feasting & Fasting in Marriage

Francine & Byron Pirola

In marriage the fasting and feasting cycle is evident in the use of natural fertility methods which are the methods of family planning approved by the Catholic Church*. A couple's marriage is nourished and strengthened when they make love. It is also strengthened by times of abstinence; these times may result from various factors including sickness, work-related separation, lack of privacy and others. Abstinence can also result from the considered and intentional choice of the couple to avoid a pregnancy for a time.

*Natural fertility methods are also known as Natural Family Planning (NFP). There are a number of different methods in this category, but they all work on the principle of identifying the fertile and infertile phases of the couple's reproductive cycle, and then timing intercourse according to their pregnancy intentions. Restraining from intercourse during a fertile phase allows couples to delay or avoid a conception. Timing intercourse for the fertile phase maximises the possibility of conception; a great help to couples who have low fertility. Modern Natural Fertility Methods are drug and side-effect free, ethical, and more reliable in avoiding conception than contraceptives such as the pill, condoms or implants. For a full discussion and more information: www.totalgift.org

Feasting & Fasting in Marriage cont.

These periods of fasting and feasting in the intimacy of the couple's marriage help sanctify the couple. Just as we can be drawn into over-eating, with its immediate physical and ethical consequences, it is possible to overindulge our sexual appetite, even in marriage, and to use it to the detriment of our spiritual health. In contrast, short periods of sexual restraint heighten the anticipation and the joy of love-making, and help couples appreciate their lovemaking as a sacramental gesture.

However, periods of sexual restraint should not become periods of total withdrawal from each other.

Couples are called to intimacy and unity every day of their married life. It is especially important during times of restraint for couples to be affectionate and tender with each other and to use these opportunities to develop their emotional and spiritual intimacy.



Waste Not Stale Bread!

One of the ways we can heighten our appreciation of the food God gives us is to avoid wastage. Here's an Tuscan favourite for using up stale bread.

Panzanella

Ingredients:

- 2/3 loaf of day-old bread (Sourdough works best. More than one type is fine too)
- 500 g of mixed tomatoes
- 6 roasted & skinned capsicums (purchased from a deli)
- 1 red onion
- 1 celery heart
- Bunch of basil
- 12 anchovies (if fresh, use 6)
- 1 tablespoon of small capers
- 10 tsb of good olive oil
- 4-5 tsb of red wine vinegar
- 1 clove of garlic
- Salt & pepper to taste



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Method:

1. Tear bread into bite-sized pieces. Set in a warm place to dry.
2. For the dressing: slice the tomatoes into bite sized pieces. Put in a collander or sieve with a bowl underneath to catch the juice. Add the anchovies and capers to bowl and set aside.
3. Finely dice the red onion and toss into the salad bowl. Peel back outer celery sticks until you see the white interior with yellow leaves. Strip off and keep the leaves and finely slice the sticks. Toss them with the onion.
4. Shred the capsicum finely and toss into the salad bowl.
5. Give the tomatoes a last squeeze over the bowl and toss them into the salad bowl. Remove anchovies from bowl and set aside.
6. Add 4 tsb of red wine vinegar and olive oil to the tomato juices. Whisk together and taste. Crush garlic into dressing, add salt, pepper and vinegar to taste.
7. Putting it altogether: Toss the bread into salad bowl. Add shredded basil leaves. Pour the dressing and thoroughly toss together.
8. Sprinkle over the top the yellow celery leaves, extra basil and anchovies. Leave to rest for at least 20 mins before serving.



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