

February 24, 2023



Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT

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ABOUT FASTING

By Sister Christine Hilliard, CSJ

Excerpt from Today's Reading

Thus says the Lord GOD:

*5 Is this the manner of fasting I wish, of keeping a day of penance:
That a man bow his head like a reed and lie in sackcloth and ashes?*

6 Do you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

*This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;*

Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke;

*7 Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the
homeless;*

*Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own.*

*8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed;*

Your vindication shall go before you,

and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

*9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help,
and he will say: Here I am!*

*If you remove from your midst oppression,
false accusation and malicious speech;*

*10 If you bestow your bread on the hungry
and satisfy the afflicted;*

*Then light shall rise for you in the darkness,
And the gloom shall become for you like midday;*

11 Then the LORD will guide you always . . .

ISAIAH 58:5-11a

Reflection

Fasting is usually seen as the act of abstaining from food. This “giving-up” has been practiced in diverse religions as a penance, e.g., as reparation and/or atonement for some sinful thought or deed. The ultimate purpose to fast is for the transformation of the person and the faith community from self-centeredness to other-centeredness.

In this passage, Isaiah mirrors other prophets who condemn formalized fasting that becomes an empty ritual missing any personal transformation or community restoration – which is the point of fasting! When Judah becomes a community based on compassion instead of oppression, justice rather than injustice, then it will be restored as a covenant people. With this in mind, perhaps fasting from food might be accompanied by fasting from judging others or from pessimism or from anxiety or from hostility. These practices invite change opening us to be more participative in a covenant relationship with God, each other, and the whole of creation. Fasting then becomes life-giving rather than a deprivation that makes us “cranky.”



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For Pondering

- Consider what you are “giving up”/fasting from this Lenten season. May it be an action that will nourish your relationship with God, others, and creation.
- Which verses in this reading from Isaiah 58 stand out for you? Write them out and reread them at the beginning of each day. Ask your God to guide you in living them especially this Lent. Perhaps you will be inspired to partner with someone else in this effort.

Closing Prayer

*God, you've given me
the physical, emotional
and spiritual will
to overcome so many obstacles
that have risen before me.
How many times have I faced
what I perceived to be
impossible, hopeless situations
and withstood them ---*

*and discovered creative solutions
through which to surmount
and master them.
You've strengthened me
again and again.
I know that you
will never fail me.*

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