

Today, we celebrate the Transfiguration of Our Lord. And our topic today is fasting. And perhaps you think this topic doesn't really fit with our Gospel reading. And you are probably right. Although, there is one clear connection that I want to make today.

Even so, the topic fits very well with our Old Testament reading last week from Isaiah 58. And it fits well with our Gospel reading next week from Matthew 4. And since Lent begins on Wednesday—with Ash Wednesday—this is the right time to address fasting as a Lenten discipline. And I have a very specific challenge for you.

It is best to start with a definition. We hear a lot about fasting in fitness culture these days. Maybe you had to fast for twelve hours for your last blood test. Maybe you are trying to lose weight. Fasting is something like a physical reset. And so, we think of skipping a meal—or a day—from food. And true fasting may include hunger. But let's take this a little deeper.

In a spiritual sense, maybe we have the Roman practice of refraining from meat on Fridays on our minds—especially with all the ads we see for fish at the restaurants. Here, we are getting closer to what fasting means. But I think this kind of fasting is often reduced to mere tradition. Many keep this kind of fast—without a reason, a purpose, or a definition. It is just what we do—rather than the kind of people we are.

Let's find a more deep-rooted understanding. *Fasting* is a deliberate act of making room for Christ in our lives. It is a voluntary and temporary discipline. It is intentional humility. With fasting we seek God's guidance. We repent. We pray. We deepen our spiritual focus. It is a physical act that directs attention toward spiritual needs.

We find fasting mentioned more than fifty times in Scripture. I want you to think of fasting as holy preparation. Fasting trains our bodies to see things spiritually—to receive God's good gifts. It's a small, quiet act of ascetic love that restores order within us—where the soul leads and the body follows—rather than the other way around. Fasting heals this hierarchy.

Spiritual attentiveness grows in us when we fast. And it awakens something deep in us—a hunger. Not just for food—but for Christ. We are walking with Jesus when we fast. We're saying with Jesus, "Man shall not live by bread alone."

And this isn't just something for the Pastor—or the more spiritual people. It is for all Christians—all who follow Christ. And we're not being legalistic when we fast. We are being formed—purified—prepared. Our hearts becomes alert—rather than casual—ready to receive—not just grace—but the Kingdom of God itself.

Of course—it needs to be said—fasting is not a means to draw attention to ourselves. It doesn't prove our spirituality before others. In fact, Jesus assumes that it will be very individual and quiet. It is a form of self-discipline, after all.

In Matthew 6—later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

And here, Jesus' comments make sense of our Old Testament reading from last week. Isaiah defines both true and false fasting. In context, the Israelites wonder why God doesn't see their fast. They ask, "Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?"

And Isaiah responds, "Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high."

Fasting cannot be separated from a holy life. We can't skip meat on Fridays and then live merely for pleasure—or worse—mistreat the people God has put in our lives.

And then God defines proper fasting in this way, "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

And then with right fasting God makes a promise, "Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday."

So, this is the kind of fast I invite you to this year. We are going to loose the bonds of wickedness in our own hearts. And we are going to cease pointing the finger at one another. And here, my desire is that we address this in one certain area. I want us to take a break from social media during Lent.

The dangers of social media are actually well-documented. Scrolling through Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, YouTube—or whatever—offers the same kind of dopamine rush of many other addictive behaviors. We scroll. We analyze. We argue. We cancel one another. We search for something—anything—to entertain us.

The average American is spending almost seven hours a day on screens. And that is just what we are doing outside of work. Between television, computers, and smartphones, we are a very distracted people. We have lost our ability to think deeply—to concentrate—to think God's thoughts.

These platforms are intentionally highly addictive, they suck our time, and harm our identity as children of God. I recently counted the posts of a friend. She posted more than 50 times just on Facebook in just one day. This is not healthy for anyone.

Now, of course, these platforms can be used for good. We have a church Facebook page. Free advertising is helpful. It is nice to see pictures of our families and friends. It can be a good source for news about our own personal interests.

But let's look more carefully at how we utilize our devices—or better—how our devices utilize us. And perhaps we need to ask, why is stepping away from social media for seven weeks such a difficult challenge? Why do we immediately come up with excuses for why this fast that I am proposing is unnecessary or impossible for me?

And it might be that we are addicted. And as with all addictions, social media harms our souls. The sociological experts are calling this addiction *doom-scrolling*. We can't put our phones down—we can't look away—we might miss something. And it is not just about seeing the next post. It's not just about the 24-hour news cycle. Many of us—often without really realizing it—use social media to build up our egos.

We want people to think well of us. We want to be the first to respond. We want others to see that we hold the right views on issues. We want them to think we are tolerant or open-minded—that we are better than other people.

And so, we post the most flattering pictures. We filter it until it looks good. And we compare ourselves to others—who also present a false view of their lives. We post so that others will think highly of us. But it is never enough. And all of the comparisons leave us all unhappy and discontent.

And social media is full of half-truths. And it is not just the advertisers—although that too is a huge problem—as they convince us to buy one more item to finally achieve fulfilment. But it is true of the way we interact with one another as well.

We post and dare people to disagree with us. We distort, exaggerate, or misrepresent our opponent's position to make it easier to attack or refute. A careless repost becomes a weapon. We say things to one another on Facebook that we would never say in person. Just look at the cruel comments people make about celebrities, athletes, politicians—and even pastors.

We have weaponized social media—often against the people we claim to love—the Christ has called us to love. We use the internet as our own personal semi-anonymous bully pulpit. The battle of this age is *fragmentation*. It is polarization.

There's a not so quiet danger lurking here. It is the temptation to believe that being "right" is the same as being holy. We've grown comfortable with arguments, positions, and defiant responses. Online especially, we're drawn to cliches and rash certainty.

But the way of Christ is not so loud. It is not about winning every argument. Sure, Jesus sometimes calls His opponents a brood of vipers. But we must remember that we are not Jesus. We don't have His sense of moral clarity. We don't always know what is best to say. And He will also die for that same brood.

If we really want to be like Jesus, the answer is to take up the Cross. It is humility. To forgive when we'd rather justify our resentment. To listen when we'd rather argue. To seek personal and spiritual transformation rather than adding to the noise.

The Gospel does not ask us if we have the most followers. It doesn't ask us if we posted the most clever meme. It asks us if we are being changed. It does not reward the cleverest debater, or the one with the most posts. It blesses the poor in spirit. The meek. The merciful. The repentant. Holiness cannot be tweeted. It is formed slowly through repentance, prayer, contemplation, silence, fasting, and faith. It is formed as God purifies our hearts.

Now, I do realize that some of us don't use social media. And, good for you. But my desire is that you still fast with us. And find out what it is that distracts you from the eternal purposes of God—and from the good of your neighbor. Look at your addictions. Look at what has your time. Look at what God has called you to battle. Where do you go to be distracted?

Maybe it is the television—alcohol—romance novels. Maybe you need to simply make changes to your way too busy schedule. Maybe food is your problem. You know yourself best. Find a fast. Make sure it hurts a little. And use this discipline to make room for Christ.

Let's quiet our hearts. Let's quiet the noise. Let's fast. In a restless age, stillness seems so foreign. But maybe this is exactly what we need. Lent should feel a lot like Psalm 23, "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The Kingdom of God is not found in frenzy. It is discovered in repentance, humility, and the quiet invocation of the holy name of Jesus.

In fact, I want us to think of fasting as standing with Christ on the ancient Mt. Tabor—the Mount of Transfiguration. The Disciples were not seeing some created glow. There is not a spotlight shining on Jesus. They were beholding the uncreated light, the divine energy of God. Jesus is the Light of the World. And so, the Disciples experience His heavenly fellowship—true communion with Christ.

Peter often says the wrong things. But he is not so far off this time. Let's say with St. Peter, "It is good, Lord, to be here." And even in the quiet that follows this glorious event, it is as Matthew points out in our reading, "And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only." In the traditional Christian life, Christ stands at the center—and everything else revolves around Him.

With fasting, the goal is to know Christ. And this guards our hearts. We pray until the mind finds depth in Christ. We repent until the heart is softened. We love until Christ becomes our very life. True theology—true spirituality—is not argument. It is light.

The season of Lent begins on Wednesday. Join me in this fast. Even better, follow Jesus as He fasts. It is His fast that makes ours worthwhile. Let's still our hearts. Let's quiet the noise. Let's set down our phones. And let's fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author *and Perfector* of our faith. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+*Soli Deo Gloria*+