

GOD'S BLESSINGS TO ALL WHO KEEP THESE - 'THE FASTS OF SAINT FRANCIS'



The Fast in Honor of Mary

"He embraced the Mother of Our Lord Jesus with indescribable love because, as he said, it was she who made the Lord of majesty our brother, and through her we found mercy. After Christ, he put all his trust in her and took her as his patroness for himself and his friars. In her honor he fasted every year from the feast of Saints Peter and Paul until the Assumption." *Bonaventure, Major Life - Chapter IX - 3* This fast lasted from June 29th until August 15th each year.



The Fast of Christmas

"All the friars without exception must fast from the feast of All Saints until Christmas..." in preparation for Christmas and so he did. *The Rules of 1221 and 1223 for the friars - Omnibus of Sources*



The "Benedictus" Fast

"In his extraordinary devotion to Christ, he fasted every year for forty days, beginning at the Epiphany, the time when Christ himself lived in the desert. Then he would go to some lonely place and remain there shut up in his cell, taking as little food and drink as possible, as he spent all his time praying and praising God." *Bonaventure, Major Life - Chapter IX - 2*

The Fast in Honor of St. Michael and the Angels

"He had an unshakable love for the Angels who burn with a marvelous fire, so that they are taken out of themselves to God and long to inflame the souls of the elect. Each year he fasted and prayed in their honor for forty days from the feast of the Assumption." *Bonaventure, Major Life - Chapter IX - 3*

"He also kept most devoutly a fast of forty days in honor of St. Michael between the feast of the Assumption and his feast." Hence, this fast, for the angels, whom he loved dearly, began on the Assumption and ended forty days later, i.e. the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, September 29th. *Celano, Second Life - Chapter CXLIX - 197*



The Fast in Honor of Peter and Paul



"...he embraced all of the Apostles with the greatest affection, and especially Saints Peter and Paul because of their passionate love of Christ. In his reverence and love for them, he used to keep a special forty-day fast in their honor." [9] This fast ended on the feasts of SS Peter and Paul, June 29th, at which time the fast in honor of Our Lady was begun. *Bonaventure, Major Life - Chapter IX - 3*



The Lenten Fast

"All the friars are to keep the Lenten fast before Easter..." and so he did too. *Omnibus of Sources - The Rule of 1223 for the friars*

Of these various fasts which St. Francis and his friars observed, Francis established two, the Christmas fast (from the day after the feast of St. Martin until Christmas), and the Lenten fast, as appropriate for laity under the First Rule of the Third Order.

The Secrets of Fasting

Fasting is limiting our intake of food in response to God's call and for the building of His kingdom. Almost all the great men and women of God throughout history have known a secret, the secret of fasting. They have understood the power and the privilege of fasting. We cannot fast unless we have God's permission. But when God permits us to fast, we have the opportunity to be in the forefront of His work. We are honored to be chosen to have such an important part in the Spirit's movement. Fasting is a *power, privilege, opportunity, and honor*. But only those who know the secret recognize this.

Old And New Testament Fasting

Throughout much of the Old Testament, there was only one fast day, the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29). Later, other fasts were called for either because of a state of emergency or on the anniversary of a national tragedy (Zech 7:3-4). Fasting was an attempt to end a terrible circumstance.

In the new covenant, we fast in a different way, as after the wedding feast (Mk 2:20). We fast not only to end tragedy but to begin ministry. Jesus fasted for 40 days to begin His public ministry (Mt 4:2). The church of Antioch fasted to begin the first missionary journey (Acts 13:2). We fast not so much because of destruction and tragedy as because of construction and fulfillment.

Fasting And Deliverance

Pope John Paul II has taught: "Jesus Himself has shown us by His own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil (cf. Mt 4:1-11). As He taught His disciples, some demons cannot be driven out except in this way (cf. Mk 9:29)" (*Gospel of Life*, 100). Fasting sets us free (Is 58:6). Even Ahab, the worst sinner in the world, was temporarily freed from destruction by turning to fasting (1 Kg 21:25-29). The Ninevites were also freed from imminent destruction through fasting (Jon 3:5-10). Esther's fasting helped free the Jewish nation from extermination (Est 4:16). Joel announced the same call (Jl 2:15). All these people knew the secret. Fasting frees us from the most impossible circumstances, even from Satan.

For example, in our fight for life and against abortion, we are in humanly impossible circumstances. The pro-death forces dominate the government, business, entertainment, education, and mass media. We are like David fighting the Goliath of Planned Parenthood. However, "it is easy for many to be overcome by a few; in the sight of Heaven there is no difference between deliverance by many or by a few; for victory in war does not depend upon the size of the army, but on strength that comes from Heaven" (1 Mc 3:18-19); see also 2 Chr 20:3; Est 4:16). Fasting is one of the main ways the Lord gives us strength for victory and freedom from the evil

one (Mt 4:1ff). Fasting is a way in which the Lord gives the underdog victory.

The Chain Reaction Of Fasting

Fasting is often the fastest way to accomplish anything. When God calls us to fast, more can be done in a short time than in years. Fasting starts a chain-reaction that begins with freedom and then results in compassion, enlightenment, healing, prayer-power, guidance, and strength (Is 58:6-11). Ultimately, fasting results in renewal (see Neh 4:1). "The ancient ruins shall be rebuilt for your sake, and the foundations from ages past you will raise up; 'Repairer of the breach,' they shall call you, 'Restorer of ruined homesteads'" (Is 58:12).

God's Will For Your Fasting

God is giving the privilege to fast possibly daily or frequently before receiving Holy Communion, at least weekly throughout the year, and annually during Lent. The Church calls us to imitate Jesus by fasting forty days during Lent (excluding Sundays and feast days). As the Church has traditionally practiced, we should only eat one meal each day of Lent unless the Lord has given us another way to fast. During the rest of the year, the Lord will call you to fast at least once a week, usually on Friday. You may be called to a total fast in which you eat nothing or to a partial fast in which you limit your intake of food. Seek the Lord's will concerning what day (or days) and what way you are to fast each week. Finally, the Lord calls us to fast daily or at least frequently before receiving Communion. We should fast in a way that we are conscious of it. For example, if we go to Mass early in the morning and don't customarily eat before Mass, we should fast the night before by not eating after supper or doing some other fast.

Possibly the Lord will tell you to fast for a special intention. Because fasting can make an average person more powerful spiritually than religious leaders, political figures, and billionaires are, Satan will make fasting as difficult as possible. However, the Lord's grace will give you victory. Fasting can break you free from the lethargy of spiritual anorexia and give you a hearty appetite for feasting spiritually on God's word, the Eucharist, and communal prayer.

Pope John Paul II has taught: "Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to *pray and fast* so that power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit" Jesus is telling you the secret of fasting. Listen to Him.

Nihil obstat: *Reverend Robert L. Hagedorn, February 22, 2001* Imprimatur: *† Most Reverend Carl K. Moeddel, Vicar General and Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, February 26, 2001* Article reprinted from *Presentation Ministries*