



The disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."

Introductory Prayer: Lord, I come to you in this meditation ready to do whatever it is you ask. Left to myself, I often take the easy and convenient path; yet I know the way of a Christian is through the narrow gate. In you I find the reason to abandon the easy path for a more perfect mission of love. I'm ready to learn the meaning of your command: "Follow me."

Petition: Lord, help me to value the place of fasting in my life.

1. Creating Hunger for God: Fasting has its place in the life of holiness. Like the precept of poverty, fasting is the purposeful privation of a natural good to make the soul more sensitive to the supernatural goods of the Spirit. It is the silencing of the flesh in order to feel more intensely a spiritual hunger for God. Just as the Israelites had to grow hungry in the desert before they could worthily receive the bread from heaven in the gift of manna, so in our life there is place to put aside the distractions of what is good for that which is holy. In the practice of self-denial, we will find the spiritual receptivity of a new

wineskin that will not burst when, through prayer, God pours in the new wine of the Kingdom.

2. Respecting the End: The practice of piety is not an end in itself. Rather, it is oriented to the ultimate end of the spiritual life: union with Christ. Christ must unweave John's disciples from an excessive rigor in their spiritual life, one that has lost God as its proper object. Spiritual pride can grow subtly in persons who take upon themselves forms of devotion or asceticism for their own sakes. In all things, even in the spiritual, we have to look at the end. If some spiritual practice does not lead us to live God's will and his presence in a more loving manner, then it is of no use to us.

3. Fasting and the Passion Lead to Spiritual Feasting: The moment of the Passion will come; the days of mourning will arrive. The fasting that the disciples lived and that the Church lives is one of uniting ourselves to the suffering Christ. Self-denial in order to do God's will becomes a participation in Christ's Redemption. Christ's closest friends will want to share his sorrow, suffer his privations and make his holocaust visible to others through their sacrificial way of life. May I be ready to live union with Christ, embracing periodic acts of self-denial and the ongoing crosses of my duty for love of souls and his Kingdom.

Conversation with Christ: Lord, help me practice true devotion and sacrifice. Renew in me a holy desire to seek you above all things, so that all I possess in my life is ordered to serving you better and glorifying your name.

Resolution: I will make a special sacrifice to fulfill a duty of my state in life, uniting myself more to the suffering Christ.