

**Lesson No. (27)**

**THE HOLY LENT**

**References:**

Matthew 6:16-18.

**Notes for Servants:**

**Objectives:**

**General:**

**Specific:**

**Instructions:**

**Bible Verse:**

**"When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."**

[Mat 6:16-18]

**Lesson:**

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**Introduction:**

When did the lent start? Since the creation of man. The first commandment was: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." [Gen 2:16,17] The average of man's life before the flood was 500 years! Whereas after the flood, it shrank to 120 years. Why, because human beings were no longer vegetarian.

The meaning of a lent period is the time to get away from the world's excitements, one of them is food.

**The importance of the Holy Lent:**

Our Lord Jesus Christ fasted for us forty days. The Holy Lent reminds us of that and helps us to follow His foot-steps. Remember, Jesus did not have to fast but he did for our sake, how much more should we?

The holy lent is the oldest and most holy lent in the Church.

In general, fasting is a strong spiritual weapon. [Mat 4:2-4]

### **Examples from the Bible:**

Adam: [Gen 2:15-17]

Moses: Moses fasted forty days to see God and talk to Him. [Exd. 19:9-18]

Elijah: After he fasted he raised up a dead person. [1Kin 17]

He also opened the door of heaven and prayed so that it rains. [1Kin 18:41-46]

At the end, after Elijah had fasted, he went up to heaven. [2Kin 2:11,12]

Daniel: Daniel fasted until Gabriel the angel appeared to him and revealed to him God's secrets. [Dan 1:8-20, 2]

Ninevah: the whole city fasted and God forgave them. [Jon]

### **The True Meaning of Fasting:**

It is not that you deprive your body from food for a certain period of time then you "gorge" your stomach with food. The lent has a spiritual meaning, it is meant to strengthen the spirit. It is a proof of our freedom in Christ: "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." [Phi 4:12,13]

The purpose of Fasting is to be away from the tempting and exciting things in the world. As Saint Paul says: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." [1Cor 6:12]

Fasting is not just eating vegetables and not eating animal products, but also it must have a period of abstinence in order to be considered a truthful fasting. This period of abstinence is determined by the father of confession according to what he judges his son/daughter is capable of.

There must be a period of abstinence because this is what initially disciplines the body. It is not just a matter of changing the type of food, but it is a true sacrifice that we offer to God. The fathers say: "the devils attack you when your stomach is full!".

Along with Fasting, there must be also Prayer and Giving alms. Fasting without Prayer is no use. This is because the main reason of why we fast is that we need to get detached from worldly desires, occupation,... to give more time to God, to talk to Him, to listen to Him, to grow in Him. With fasting also comes giving to the poor. In that time, more than ever, we don't just concentrate on our needs, even our spiritual needs, but we consider the needy as well.

### **Fasting and Vegetable Foods:**

1. Adam was a vegetarian. The proof is that the Lord told him: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat", even though the animals and birds were with him in Paradise. [Gen 2:16-19]

2. Daniel and the three friends. [Dan 1:]

3. The average life-time of man before the flood was 500 years, while after the flood, i.e. when human started to eat meat and were no longer vegetarian, man's average age dropped to 120 years!

### **Fasting and Spiritual Life:**

In order for the fasting to be effective, one should:

1. study in the Bible and meditate on the word of God.

2. overcome specific sin,
3. memorizing some alms,
4. reading spiritual books,
5. training oneself to be meek and kind,
6. having an exercise like humility,
7. learning hymns.

**Fasting and being Moderate:**

When we fast, we should not compete with others or with ourselves to beat a record in abstinence period or so, but as was stated earlier, this is something that everyone sorts it out with his/her father of confession. The spirit of fasting is far more important than external rites.

**Merits of Fasting:**

1. Self-control
2. Accompanied by Repentance [Jon 3:5-10]
3. Followed by humiliation and modesty before God, ex: the Ninevah people, from their king to the lowest, were in sack clothes.
4. Fasting is not just abstaining from eating certain foods for a certain period of time, but it is time for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
5. It must be accompanied by prayers.