
23 FRIDAY

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58: 1 - 9
Ps 50: 3-6, 18-19
Matt. 9: 14 – 15

As Lent begins, we're reminded about fasting. Catholics used to be known as people who didn't eat meat on Fridays (abstinence). But we fasted too, and often very strictly. Fasting, however, is no longer common practice among Catholics, except for a couple of days each year. Meanwhile, many of our devout fellow-Christians do fast regularly, and the month-long annual fasting-time of our Muslim fellow-citizens is publicly well-known.

Jesus seems to connect fasting with mourning, when He says in today's gospel that wedding-guests will only fast when the bride-groom is taken away. But the Lord is with us all the time, and joy in the Risen Christ rather than gloomy faces should be our image. So, what about fasting? Elsewhere in the gospels Jesus talks of fasting being more effective than prayer, that certain kinds of prayer need to be accompanied by fasting. The bible and the church also remind us that fasting is not simply eating or drinking less than usual or "giving up" something. It's a matter of doing justice to people, especially those in need. Jesus also said that when we fast we should not make a 'show' of it; it's something personal between us and our Father. So, this Lent, how shall I fast? It's not strictly a mourning time: the Lord is with us, even though the priest wears purple vestments. Fasting is something serious. A modern custom of 'charity fasting', where people gather for 12 or 24 or whatever number of hours, only taking bread and water, and donating their normal meal costs to charity is a good symbol and practice, but it's usually a one-off thing. How should I fast each day of this season of grace?