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21 WEDNESDAY

St Aloysius Gonzaga  
Wednesday, Week 11 of Year

2 Kings 2: 1, 6-14

Ps 30: 20,21,24

Matt 6: 1-6, 16-18

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving ---- this well-known trio of devotional practices are not confined solely to Christianity. Today's gospel is Jesus' teaching about the manner and attitude with which His followers should practice them. For each, there's the same framework: they should be very personal, from the heart, a private matter between the individual and God, and with no other intention or motive than our giving Him honour, glory and the trust that is our faith. This is about the personal side of our religious devotion and practice in which we interact individually with God our Father, and with Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. [We also have, of course, our community and communal prayer, fasting and almsgiving as members together in the body of Christ, in our public worship and acts of devotion]. In modern times, the regular practice of both personal and community fasting (during Lent, for example) seems to have dropped from Catholic consciousness and even usage. Yet our world has more people who do not have enough to eat, as well as more people who eat too much and too unwisely, and also more people who equivalently "fast" in the interest of "keep fit" or fashionable body-shape and vanity. Why do we Christians not give better witness and example to our world through the way in which we regularly fast, like we try to do through our praying and our giving of alms? Everyone knows about the Muslim fasting-season of Ramadan and similar practices in other world religions: what do we do? Prayer, fasting and mercy are inter-linked: can I really pray if I don't fast and give alms?