

## Scripture Reading

**A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew** (*Matthew 6:16-18*) *Jesus teaches us how to fast*

“When you fast, do not look gloomy as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

## Reflection - The Power of Fasting

**Powerful effects of fasting proven in Old and New Testaments.** In both New and Old Testaments, fasting with the right attitudes coupled with sincere prayer and turning away from evil have been shown to secure God’s powerful intervention in helping individuals, communities and even whole civilisations (eg. see Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) avert disaster and procure divine protection. In the story of Queen Esther during the Persian Empire the Jews faced a great crisis as Haman, the powerful prime minister made a plan to kill every Jew as a result of Mordecai (a Jew)’s refusal to kneel and bow to him. Queen Esther, (Jewish not known by her husband, the king) in desperation quietly ordered the Jews (herself included) to fast. Divine intervention was secured and the Jews were spared from total destruction.

**Jesus, a powerful advocate of fasting.** Jesus not only teaches us how to fast but set a powerful and convincing example by His fasting in the desert. After His baptism, Jesus did not begin His public ministry immediately. And it was only after His fasting in the desert, that He emerged full of the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 4:14). Only then, did He embark on His public ministry. Fasting coupled with sincere prayers and fueled by a great love for His Father’s will strengthened Jesus to be obedient to God in the highest possible degree – obedience unto death.

**Power of fasting in combating evil.** Further demonstration of the great power of God that can be released by sincere prayers and fasting is attested to by Jesus Himself who said, “This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting” (cf. Mark 9:29) after He healed a boy with an evil spirit when the disciples asked Him why they themselves could not do it.

**Fasting is a powerful help in self-control.** Fasting when done gently, and coupled with sincere prayers and right intentions, is an indispensable help in mastering control over our fleshy nature – everything in us that opposes the Spirit of God - which results in sensuality in our body, and self pride and disorderly self esteem in the mind. Due to the effects of sin, our fallen fleshy nature is diametrically opposed to our spirit which tends towards grace. Thus the mortification provided by a simple fasting can help us win the battle within ourselves: nature versus grace, as we are strengthened against temptations on our body or mind. In gaining more self control, we can more easily subject the body to mind, and the mind to God, and thus working towards the restoration of the order that is originally ordained by God. The heart gains its rest and interior peace sets in.

**Fasting is a powerful spiritual weapon against sin, and helps us get closer to God.** On the spiritual level, fasting humbles our spirit. King David said in *Psalms 35:13*: “...I humbled myself with fasting.” It can empty our hearts of self-love and open up our souls to God. The open heart is now more able to receive the graces that God wishes so much to give us. It can help provide the interior condition for the Holy Spirit to work more actively within us: humility allows the Holy Spirit to illuminate our conscience and reveal to us our true spiritual condition, revealing the sins we are not aware of, bringing about true repentance and spiritual transformation, leading to a more intimate and personal relationship with our Lord. Fasting with sincere prayers help to reduce disorderly attachment to ourselves.

## Conversation with Jesus

Precious Lord, thank You for teaching me how to grow in maturity as a Christian. You desire so much to have a really intimate relationship with me so that You can speak to me heart-to-heart. However, my self-love and attachments have closed up my poor heart, and Your graces have difficulty in reaching me. I want to show my sincerity in my love for You by striving to control my body and mind and by humbling my heart and spirit. Please bless my holy resolution and render me all the help I need. Mary, Protectress of the Faith, please strengthen me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.