

Fasting is the act of returning to God - Fr Luka Sidaros 28/01/2018

“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.

The church fasts today, tomorrow, and the day after—three days—the fast of the people of Nineveh. They (the Ninevites) humbled themselves before God, crying out and sitting in ashes, each turning from his evil way, so the Lord would lift His wrath from them.

The fast was not a change of diet, but an act of returning to God.

God is the examiner of hearts, and repentance is actually an act of the heart; hidden; internal.

None of us can offer true repentance to God through crying out and tears unless we realise the path we are on is wrong and want to correct that path.

The way by which we live springs from the heart. So, if man is convinced of his current way, he will say, ‘I am good’. Why would he repent?

But the one who repents is the one who realises he is in danger. Because his life isn’t right. His conduct isn’t good; his thoughts are not in accordance with the Bible, and his life is on the wrong path. So, he changes the path.

So what convinces someone he is good? You ask someone how they are (spiritually), and they say, ‘I’m good’. So why is he convinced he is good? He measures himself against the community. The community is very bad; it’s very corrupt, full of uncleanness, adultery, theft, and cheating, etc. Therefore in comparison, he is good.

Or inside the church, he measures himself against outward displays of piety. Like the pharisee he says, ‘God, thank You that I am not like everyone else, like the tax collectors and sinners¹. I do everything in the church; I do all that is required of me; I fast all the fasts; I offer all the tithes. What does God want from me? My way of life is good.’

But our fathers the saints were not of that mind.

Or sometimes according to St Paul the Apostle, he measures himself against himself, as it is written “*But they, measuring themselves by themselves...*”². So, he finds himself good; why would he repent?

But if man realises he is needy, that he is a sinner—and it’s not just a word people say (out of humility), but the truth—if he realises this, he can start on the correct path; he can begin to repent and change.

“...let every one turn from his evil way”.³

How easy is it to pretend? In Revelations, to one of the angels of the very prominent churches, it’s written, “*I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—*”⁴

Imagine someone being in that condition, yet thinking he is good.

¹ Luke 18:11

² 2 Corinthians 10:12

³ Jonah 3:8

⁴ Revelations 3:17

Examining ourselves is difficult. There is nothing easier than turning a blind eye to our souls, so we can do whatever we like. But what is inside the depths of our souls? Leave all the external. What's inside? What needs to be changed?

So, if fasting is not accompanied by change, then believe me it is not fasting. There must be a change in life. In what life? In the deep life, in the heart.

You can say, 'I've tried a lot; I change for one day and then I take 10 steps back'. These are attempts. But true change encompasses all of life, from glory to glory, and advances man daily, increasing his depth and humility daily.

St Macarius the Great was a father of fathers; he was like St Anthony but was in the Desert of Scetis, with only a few years between them. He went into the inner wilderness and saw monks. He didn't know there was anyone alive there. He saw their routine and way of life and returned to tell the other monks, "I'm not yet a monk. Now I have seen monks". Imagine, these people in such high ranks saw themselves as not having started yet!

On his death bed St Shishoy said, "I wish to repent". Imagine! And we say, 'I have no need for anything, what do you mean 'repent'?' Those who lived their entire lives in holiness, reaching Christian perfection say, 'I want to repent; I wish to repent one day', and those who are not in repentance at all feel as though they are in perfection.

This is deception; this is fraud. Why? Because we are floundering in the world; we don't truly sit with ourselves and hold ourselves accountable.

Okay, how? By what measure? The Gospel.

See the commandments; which of these have we really done...truly?

Christ's commandments in the Bible: love your enemies—did that happen? Bless those who curse you? Do good to those who hate you, pray for those.... Did any of this happen in life? Never! Never!

We didn't achieve anything, and we did nothing but praise ourselves and accept the praise of others as if we made it. No, we haven't even started.

That's why I say it's good that the fast has come, which is humility before God and changing our lives.

"...let every one turn from his evil way".⁵

Our hands have done evil; our thoughts aren't good; our behaviour isn't good.

Let this fast be an opportunity to come forth to change, so we can find acceptance and grace, and God lifts His wrath from us. And glory be to God forever. Amen."

⁵ Jonah 3:8

Bible Transcript (Bible Verses)

1. Luke 18:11

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector."

2. 2 Corinthians 10:12

"For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."

3 & 5. Jonah 3:8

"But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands."

4. Revelations 3:17

"Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—"

