

When you pray, say: Our Father who are in heaven¹...

Fr. Luke Sidarous

Preparation week sermon.

Downloaded: 18th of February 2023

❖ Seen by Our Father:

The fathers of the Church organised this reading for the Sunday of the lent preparation week.

The words of Christ, to whom is due glory, are our guide in the days of lent.

Christ's words direct our eyes to the Father, also, directs our attention toward acts of kindness, mercy, prayer and fasting.

He said when you are merciful, pray, or fast; these acts; are the consequence of being born from the Father, born from our sonship to God. And the One who watches you, is the Father.

There are two who judge these acts; prayer, fasting and mercy; Our Father, and people.

There are many who do these works to please man; and there are others whose eyes are on Our Father.

The first group, which is the majority, they fast, pray and do acts of mercy so that the people will notice them, their intention is to please man. And of course, their reward is from man, being recognised, honoured or praised by man.

The other group, their full attention is upon the Father, they desire nothing from man; as if people do not exist to them.

As if their goal or their conscience is invisible, unknown, or unseen.

One, whose goal is the praise of men, whether when they pray, or fast, their deeds appear spiritual, but their intention and their goal is geared towards man.

The other, whose goal is hidden, is directed towards the Father.

On the surface, they both look the same, but He who searches the heart and all being, knows which one is which.

¹ Lk. 11: 2; Mt. 6: 5-15

For that reason, Christ warned us, one has to be careful, for only the conscience is seen by the Father.
So, to start the fast, or to do acts of mercy, one has to purify their conscience, from the praise of men.

If I receive my reward from men, in praise, or honour, this reward devalues my deeds.

For people's opinions, whether good or bad, will not grant me heaven or hell, what will I gain from praise?

"For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends"²

Strive that your praise is from God.

❖ Why and how to fast:

Therefore, to begin the fast, one has to purify the conscience, and correct their goal; ask yourself, why do I do all these good deeds, are they beneficial to God? Certainly not, it is me who benefits.

God is surrounded by the hosts of the Cherubim and the Seraphim, Angels and Archangels, all praising Him; God is not in need, it is us who are in need.

If fasting is mere change of diet, it becomes too heavy to deal with; but fasting is Reconciliation with the Father, in secret, and He will reward you according to your fast.

If you do mercy, He will reward you mercy; blessed are the merciful³.

We all seek mercy, we pray "Lord have mercy"; "Keri-Elison"; Christ said if you are merciful, in doing acts of kindness, or being merciful to others, you will receive mercy.

If you forgive, you will be forgiven. If you judge or convict others sins, and not forgive, you will not be forgiven.

This is the way that Christ prepared for us.

If we do all the deeds of mercy in secret, and receive no reward from man, then, we will receive our reward from Our Father.

And there is a great gulf between the reward of man and the recompense of God.

It is not that the praise itself is the problem, the is problem is within me, if I receive praise from men, my Ego becomes a god to me to please, to appease my ego, this is my problem, my sin.

² 2 Cor. 10: 18

³ Mt. 5: 7

So, if anyone that does the good deeds will encounter praise from people. it is how you deal with this praise, either you will accept it as a reward, or reject it.

Some will do the good deed and will seek the attention of people, begging for praise.

Christ said:

“I do not receive honour from men”⁴

For that reason, Christ said: “when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place”⁵

Enter your room, away from the eyes of men, close your door and pray.

And this prayer is the joy of being in the presence of the Father, in the Bosom of the Father, it is neither a duty nor a law, but joy.

What honour, what glory, what joy that I call God, Father.

How can one be like a robot when you talk with God, when you call Him “Father”; we ought to say it in truth and in conviction.

We pray “Our Father”, because when one prays, he or she prays for their brothers and sisters. For Christ loved me and everyone, died for me and for everyone.

Then when we pray in secret, saying “Our Father” it reveals our love for our brothers, a proof of my Christianity.

When you stand up to pray, the first thing we do, is to forgive, so that, my heart becomes pure, and for the prayer to be acceptable.

The Church fathers likened this to one who washes their hands before offering a present or a gift to someone. It is unpleasant to offer anything with unclean hands.

Wash first, that is forgive first, clearing my conscience, before offering my prayer; we do this in the liturgy.

In the old days, they used to tear up their clothes; but God said:

“Rend your hearts and not your garments”⁶ when you approach God, in pure heart.

That is when I search my heart, before God does. Sometimes, I deceive myself, because I use the standards of men, but I have to use the God’s measure, the Bible and the commandments, not according man’s measure.

⁴ Jn. 5: 41

⁵ Mt. 6: 6

⁶ Joel 2: 12-13

It was said of one of the kings; (Belshazzar); “you have been weighed in balances, and found wanting”⁷

Forget the measure of men, and think of God’s measure, when God measures our deeds, thoughts and intent, what are we going to do?

That is why in this lent, Christ’s instructions of how to fast and pray, they are the constitution for any person intending to fast.

❖ The Reward:

And, as God is our Father, regardless of how small or trivial the deed offered to the Father, He will accept; ask any father.

Christ said:

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”⁸

Or any son asks his father, does not the father give the son out of love.

Any deed offered to God, with a pure heart, is precious in the eyes of God. Our offering is nothing but insignificant; but in His sight they are precious, because we are His children.

The sound of the child in the ears of their father, brings the father joy, that is our prayers to our Father; even any scribble by a child brings joy to their father, these are our deeds.

Then offer what you can; a sacrifice of your bodies⁹; may its aroma be acceptable. Or an act of mercy, maybe its monetary value is small, but in the sight of God, beautiful.

Do not fail in doing good, as long as you do not receive honour or praise from men, in His sight, it is exceedingly precious.

He will say to those who acted mercifully:

“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in”¹⁰

Any act of mercy or kindness offered to any poor or needy person, Christ assumes their condition and their debt upon Himself.

⁷ Dan. 5:27

⁸ Mt. 7: 11

⁹ Rom. 12: 1

¹⁰ Mt. 25: 34-35

“He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord” ¹¹

Let’s start this lent with grace, and keep the commandment, so that neither our fast, nor our prayer may become routine and monotonous; and the acts of mercy are without heavenly reward.

Keep the words of Christ in your heart, and fix your eyes, your thoughts, and your heart on heaven, for the reward of men is cheap, but the reward from Our Father that exceeds all thought is our real reward.

Glory to God, forever. Amen

¹¹ Prov. 19: 17