

# Heroic Sacrifice: The Role of Fasting in Spirituality

## Headline:

The Church embraces Fasting as an important tool for spiritual purity. We must guard against prioritizing Materialism and urges of the body over spiritual harmony with God. Today we will examine ways we can strengthen our souls against the power of sin through Fasting.

## Objective:

As Catholic men we are entrusted by God to be protectors of our families, society and the Church. However, sin pulls us away and leads to laziness, indifference and excess of the body. Let's examine Fasting options which promote self-control so we can become leaders and role models who serve God's kingdom.

**Song Suggestion:** Be Not Afraid.

## Bible and Catechism Readings

### Matthew 6:16-18

"And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

### Matthew 9:14-15

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

### Catechism 1438

The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice.<sup>36</sup> These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as songs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).

**Saint: St. Thomas Aquinas** was a champion of Fasting as an integral part of self-discipline and contemplative prayer.

"An action is virtuous due to its being directed by reason to a noble good. And this is true of fasting. For we fast for three purposes: (1) to restrain the desires of the flesh; (2) to raise the mind to contemplate sublime things; (3) to make satisfaction for our sins. These are good and noble things, and so fasting is virtuous." Summa Theologiae II-II 147.

"Fasting is a virtue that restrains desire; for sin occurs more readily by excess in delights, and so it is virtuous to restrain the bodily appetites." (IV Sent 15:3:1:1)

**Vignette:** – Pete was your standard cradle Catholic, happily married and father of three children. His family went to Mass on Sunday as long as it was convenient for them. Therefore, Mass attendance was spotty. Pete wasn't getting much from his faith and he knew his family wasn't either.

One day while watching TV, as he was flipping through the channels, he came across a prominent priest on EWTN who was speaking of the importance of fasting and prayer. Pete decided going out of his comfort zone may be the push he needs to get more out of his faith. Plus, he could stand to lose 20 pounds, perhaps he could kill two birds with one stone.

Pete started by abstaining from meat on Fridays and stopped snacking between meals. He also downloaded the Halo app for the segment on daily Mass readings and contemplation. Before long he began looking forward to Sunday Mass and never missed. His family picked up on his increase in discipline and they starting going to Mass with him. He encouraged them to go but never tried to force the issue.

Over time his family became more involved in the Church and various volunteer opportunities. Pete became a leader to his family not by telling them what to do as much as leading by example. His children are now in their 20s and two attend Mass regularly. One daughter fell away during college but Pete feels that one day the Lord will bring her back. He has hope which is a by product of his trust in God which all started with prayer and fasting.

### **Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:**

What was your “growing up” experience of fasting? Did it leave a good impression on you?

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Do you and your family find it hard to fast? Why or why not?

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How do you handle self-sacrifice during Lent? Are there positive actions you take? Do they ever extend beyond Lent?

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Have you ever combined prayer and fasting in your petitions? Share some examples and what motivated you.

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The Church Precepts on fasting are in limited circumstances. How might you incorporate fasting/self-sacrifice into more of your life? Would you want to?

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**Action Plan:**

Choose one area in your life, this week, to practice an example of self-sacrifice or self-denial. This could be traditional fasting (the E5 Men's Fasting website might be of interest to you). Be creative; make it a challenge for yourself. Try other choices if you struggle the first time. When you succeed, consider upping the challenge, make it part of you, and know that you are winning the battle against the flesh. Now challenge your family to join in.

**Resources:**

<https://catholicgentleman.com/2014/04/spiritual-weapons-fasting/>

<https://www.pathsoflove.com/fasting/fasting.html>

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