

Homily

03.08.2019 – Friday after Ash Wednesday

Is 58:1-9 Mt 9:14-15



Both readings this morning speak of fasting, one of the traditional Lenten practices. We tend to think of fasting in relation to food. To fast is to deprive ourselves of certain foods for a period of time. In the first reading, however, Isaiah defines fasting much more broadly than that. He understands it as fasting from all those ways of relating to people that damage and oppress them and replacing such ways of relating with working for justice on behalf of those in greatest need. Isaiah seems to be saying that fasting can never be separated from that other Jewish practice that we associate with Lent, almsgiving, the sharing of our resources with others.

Isaiah reminds us this morning that Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, all three stand or fall together. They are three expressions of one way of life. We cannot focus on any one to the harm of the other two. The kind of fasting that pleases God, according to Isaiah, is one finds expression in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, letting the oppressed go free. Such service of others makes our prayer more acceptable to God.

In this morning's gospel reading, he indicates that the celebratory aspect of his ministry means that fasting cannot have the same significance as it

does for the disciples of the Pharisees and John the Baptist. Jesus' ministry is more like a wedding feast than a funeral, with himself as the bridegroom and his disciples as the bride. Jesus goes on to say that this celebratory element of his ministry does not exclude fasting.

However, it does give it a different tone and focus. That celebratory element of the Lord's ministry continues today in the church. The risen Lord wants his joy to be in our lives, a joy the world cannot give. Our fasting is with a view to entering more fully into the Lord's joy; it is in the service of deepening our loving relationship with the Lord so that the joy of his Spirit may be in our lives. As Isaiah in the first reading reminds us, and as Jesus would confirm, our fasting is also in the service of a more loving relationship with others, especially those in greatest need.

We must understand our role and responsibility in receiving the priceless gift, Jesus on the Cross "paid the price" of death for our Sins. It's not simply a gift that God offers by saying, "OK, I paid the price, now you're completely off the hook." No, we believe He says something more like this, "I have opened the door to salvation through my suffering and death. Now I invite you to enter that door with me and unite your own sufferings with mine so that my sufferings, united with yours, will bring you to salvation and freedom from sin.

So, in a sense, we are not "off the hook;" rather, we now have a way to freedom and salvation by uniting our lives, sufferings and sins to the Cross of Christ. The Lent is an opportunity to join Jesus on the cross by fasting, prayer and almsgiving for our salvation.

Let us pray:

During the "Season of Lent" "Season of Grace" may the small sacrifices and acts of self-denial I offer You become a source of my deeper union with You.

Jesus, I trust in You.

