



Lent

Week 3 – Fasting

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity to gather here tonight in your holy Name.
We ask your blessing upon our Emmaus Group and upon the time we will spend together.
Draw us closer to You through each other. Give us the ability to search our own
hearts and know ourselves ever more, so we might better know You.*

Fasting: The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. (CCC 1434) *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. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works). (CCC 1438)

Read both Matthew 6:16-21 and Matthew 6:25-34 out loud once, and then silently to yourself

Discuss: What word, phrase, or idea most jumped out to you?

Discuss: How does Jesus call us to fast in Matthew 6? What is ironic about his teaching?

Read Acts 13:1-3 out loud

Discuss: How did the disciples use fasting in their decision-making? How might fasting help a person or community discern?



"We all color devotions according to our own likings and dispositions. One man sets great value on fasting, and believes himself to be leading a very devout life, so long as he fasts rigorously, although the while his heart is full of bitterness; -- and while he will not moisten his lips with wine, perhaps not even with water, in his great abstinence, he does not scruple to steep them in his neighbor's blood, through slander and detraction. Another man reckons himself as devout because he repeats many prayers daily, although at the same time he does not refrain from all manner of angry, irritating, conceited or insulting speeches among his family and neighbors. This man freely opens his purse in almsgiving, but closes his heart to all gentle and forgiving feelings towards those who are opposed to him; while that one is ready enough to forgive his enemies, but will never pay his rightful debts save under pressure. Meanwhile all these people are conventionally called religious, but nevertheless they are in no true sense really devout."

St. Francis de Sales

Discuss: St. Francis de Sales challenges us to examine our intentions as we move through Lent. What is the role of intention in fasting? How do you approach the practice of fasting?

"The second element of the Lenten journey is fasting. We must be careful not to make a formal fasting, or one that in truth 'satisfies' us because it makes us feel as though we have all in order. Fasting makes sense if it really affects our security, and also if a benefit to others comes from it, if it helps us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who bends down to his brother in need and takes care of him. Fasting involves choosing a sober life, which does not waste, which does not 'discard'. Fasting helps us to train the heart to essentiality and sharing. It is a sign of awareness and responsibility in the face of injustices, abuses, especially towards the poor and the little ones, and is a sign of our trust in God and His providence."

Pope Francis, Ash Wednesday Homily, 2014

Discuss: How does fasting provide freedom? Pope Francis talks about fasting "training our hearts." *What* can we fast from to bring a holier order to our lives? What has been distracting you from God?

"The Lord measures out perfection neither by the multitude nor the magnitude of our deeds, but by the manner in which we perform them."

St. John of the Cross

Discuss: What can you fast *for*? Is your fasting more about bettering yourself or glorifying God?

