

The Catholic Doctor is In

FASTING

When I first contemplated writing an article on fasting I thought it might give me the opportunity to discuss all the health benefits involved. Being a doctor, that was my initial simplistic view. After just a little research and reflection I realized how little I really knew. So I am going to presume there will be plenty of readers like me that need some education. Fasting is primarily for the spirit! There are certainly some health benefits especially for the overweight crowd, but it's all about the spirit and without a plan of prayer during your fast it is really an empty exercise. I also became very much aware of how wimpy I have been over the years with incorporating fasting into my life as a Catholic. I don't eat meat on Fridays during Lent and on Good Friday and Ash Wednesday I try to follow the teaching of two small meals, one regular meal and no eating in between. Then on Easter I more than make up for it! Sound familiar at all?

Now look at Jesus.... a 40 day fast in the wilderness, are you kidding me? I can't even wrap my arms around a full 1 day fast, which I am embarrassed to say I have never done other than when I was sick and praying to the porcelain gods.

The Bible tells us that adding fasting to prayer elevates your ability to more fully connect with God. Biblical characters added fasting to prayer when they needed to step up their game and get serious about worshiping God or getting God's attention. It sounds like a good idea for modern times as well. Do you need forgiveness? Do you or a loved one need healing? Has your spiritual life faltered? Maybe it is time for a fast.

Some basic ground rules are in order. There are some people that should not embark on a significant fast. They include people that are fighting advanced cancer or other serious illness, Insulin dependent diabetics, eating disorders, pregnancy, or if you are just too underweight. Whether it's a one meal fast or a several day fast you don't restrict liquids. Dehydration is never good and not the goal here. So drink plenty of water or juice. I would suggest minimizing caffeine or for extra penance no caffeine at all (that might kill me!). Start out by missing a meal. Then maybe a couple of meals. If you are real serious you may consider a multiple day fast. If you want to fast for more than 2 or 3 days then I would suggest a conversation with your doctor before starting. If you plan to fast for a prolonged period of time like several weeks or maybe 40 days then there needs to be a plan in place for providing adequate daily nutrition like several small meals per day. I really do not recommend going longer than 2 days without some caloric intake.

I know of a couple that fasts one day a week by eliminating all foods other than natural juices. They use their juicer to combine fruit and vegetables into nutritional liquid meals. This also would give you health benefits by reducing your caloric consumption for the week and would provide you with a wonderful blast of natural vitamins and minerals (which as discussed in a previous column is the way nature intended people to get them).

When fasting, it is essential that you design it around major time for prayer. It is thru praying and fasting together that you will close the gap between your humanity and the spiritual. Your goal should be to conquer the flesh. With a successful fast your mind will become sharper and clearer and very possibly you may be able to discern the right decision or course of action that you have been seeking. Is this not what Jesus was doing in the desert for 40 days and nights?

One more very important thing. When you fast, don't tell anybody! As Matthew 6:16-18 says: "When you fast, you are not to look glum as the hypocrites do. They change the appearance of their faces so that others may see they are fasting. I assure you, they are already repaid. When you fast, see to it that you groom your hair and wash your face. In that way no one can see you are fasting but your Father who is hidden; and your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

Dr. Kaminkas is a cardiologist and the treasurer of the Dr. Jerome Lejeune Guild of the Catholic Medical Association. All health professionals are welcome to join. Visit www.fortwaynecma.com.

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