

FASTING IS BENEFICIAL

—by St. John Chrysostom—

Many Christians, unaware of the great value of fasting, either keep the fast with difficulty or reject it altogether. We should not be afraid to fast but embrace it with joy. There is nothing for us to fear; rather, fasting is fearful for the demons. When she is brought before them, they are overcome with fear, they freeze and become paralyzed, and they are bound with invisible chains—especially when she is accompanied by her inseparable companion, prayer. This is why Christ said, “this generation [of demons] does not come out other than with prayer and fasting” (Mt. 17:21).

Since fasting drives the enemies of our salvation far away and is so frightful to them who oppress us, we should love her dearly, not be afraid of her. If there is something for us to fear, it is overeating and drunkenness. Because they handcuff us and lead us captive to the cruel passions, whereas fasting frees us from the torturous passions and grants spiritual freedom to us. Since fasting fights against our enemies, frees us from slavery, and restores our freedom, what other reasons do we need in order to embrace her?

I remind you of the two chief prophets of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah. They had great boldness before God on account of their other virtues; yet, when they wanted to speak with Him, they fled to fasting, which in turn brought them closer to the Lord (vid. Ex. 24:18; 3 Kg 19:8).

Even long before them, at the very beginning of creation when God made man, He immediately entrusted him into the hands of fasting, in order for her, like a compassionate mother and excellent teacher, to secure his salvation. The declaration “you may eat food from every tree in the garden; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat” (Gen. 2:16-17) was nothing other than a commandment to fast. If fasting was necessary in Paradise, it is much more essential [for us] out of paradise. If it served as useful medication prior to the wound, it is much more useful now that we have become wounded. If it was an indispensable weapon before war broke out with the passions and the demons, it is much more necessary now that the war has been initiated.

Fasting made God recall His decision to destroy the Ninevites. Jonah went to Nineveh and conveyed the divine verdict to its citizens: “Three more days and Nineveh shall be destroyed” (Jon. 3:4). When the people heard this, they did not doubt or remain indifferent. Rather, everyone quickly fled to fasting—men, women, masters, slaves, rulers, residents, children, and the elderly. Fasting was even imposed upon the

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irrational animals. Simultaneously, everyone throughout the city mourned, prayed, and repented. Do you see why I said earlier that we should be afraid of overeating and drunkenness? These two things almost destroyed Nineveh, whereas fasting saved the city from certain destruction.

The prophet Daniel entered into the lions' den along with fasting and came out unharmed, as if he had been thrown into a sheep's pen (Dan. 6:16-23). The three youths entered into the furnace with fasting, and this is why they exited from the fire with their bodies intact and shinning (Dan. 3:19-27). If that was a real fire, why didn't it do what fire normally does? If those were real bodies, why were they not burnt like normal bodies? Why? Ask fasting. She will give you the answer; she will solve the puzzle for you. It is truly an enigma how human bodies wrestled with and prevailed over fire. Do you see the extraordinary battle? Do you see the even more wondrous victory? Marvel at fasting and receive her with open arms. Because when she is capable of rescuing people from fire, guarding others from lions, distancing the demons, overruling God's decision, subduing the crazed passions, restoring our freedom, and granting peace to our soul, when she holds so many goods in her hands, isn't it foolish for us to avoid and be afraid of fasting?