

Giving UP or Giving OF

As we approach Lent, I would be remiss if I didn't reflect back on my childhood and the "sacrifices" we made for Lent.

Giving up candy was always a "go to," and we may have felt a badge of honor as we savored those Easter eggs filled with all kinds of flavors on Easter Morning if we made it through the 40 days without breaking our commitment. A colorful basket filled with plastic green grass hid those jelly beans and malted milk balls beneath the chocolate, colored eggs, and marshmallow Peeps.

As we matured, we stepped up our game from candy to potato chips. When we intended "salty snacks," in our moment of weakness, we would justify by saying, "Well, I gave up potato chips, but not pretzels or corn chips." We look back with humor, realizing that our human nature and times of weakness were more significant in keeping us from Heaven than a crunchy snack or a mishap with a piece of meat on a Friday.

The entire chapter of Isaiah 58 is titled True Fasting. In verse 58:3, "Why have we fasted, and You have not seen? Why have we humbled ourselves, and You have not noticed? Behold, on the day of your fast, you do as you please, and you oppress all your workers." They were frustrated and felt God did not see their affliction or consider their needs.

Is our intent to be seen and act like the Pharisees who would 'blow the trumpets' whenever they did anything which could be perceived as an action above and beyond? They brought attention to themselves, not to glorify God.

Their perceived sacrifices were driven by an ulterior motive: to increase their score(s) in the public's eyes, believing this would bring favor with God.

Pride is the first of many steps towards failure.

Humble yourself as written in 1 Peter 5:6. 'Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.'

Too often, we may find ourselves seeking the "atta boys" for a simple act that, quite frankly, is deserving of being unnoticed. We gave a little, but it had little to no impact beyond our ego.

What if we looked at fasting not as a form of punishment, but a pursuit of something greater?

Are we fasting to glorify God or to bring light to our suffering?

Are we honoring God?

Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."

Some may say, with a valid point, that fasting is a form of cleansing, and they would be correct. Avoid the additives, which often cause other health issues that are not considered when we consume our favorite treats.

Our body is His, and we need to take care of the body to glorify Him. We may receive a new body when we get to Heaven, but we can make sure the gap between our earthly body and our heavenly body is a small ravine, rather than the Grand Canyon.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 states, Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So, you must honor God with your body.

Do we feel that in fasting it may 'fix us' or do we arrogantly say, "I don't need anything changed. I'm good just as I am."

Pride will once again position itself front and center if we let it.

The purpose of fasting is to remove items, physical, emotional, and spiritual, which are not productive. When we make the needed changes, we often feel vulnerable, and that scares many of us.

What if we took the 'bull by the horns' or, as C. S. Lewis said, "Bulls run towards the storm."

Philippians 4:13 "For I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me." He has our backs and lifts us when we fall.

Face the challenge head-on and get through it faster. It, whatever it may be, is going to happen, so face it and get through it.

I believe there are additional things we can do.

What if we focused on becoming better people and started giving more? As the trend continues, we may find ourselves gladly giving up things that are not beneficial, and we soon realize that fasting from them was not as difficult as we had originally believed.

So, are we giving up or giving of ourselves?

I think you will quickly find that by giving of ourselves, we gain quickly and the profits become abundant, while the losses become extinct.

I wonder if God ever laughs when we say, "God, I have given everything, I have nothing left, and I don't know what else I can give."

He knows we have not even scratched the surface of everything he gave to us to glorify him.

Dig a little deeper; as best existence ever is, it's just one shovel deeper.

It just takes a little more effort and sacrifice on your part to find what He has for us.

Happy Lent.

Vivat Jesus