

Fasting without Fanfare

Among the people of God fasting has always been considered an essential aspect of religion. The origins of fasting are rooted in Old Testament practices. In ancient Hebrew customs, the privation of food was repeatedly exercised to recall one's dependence upon God as the giver and source of all earthly gifts. Fasting was frequently prescribed as preparatory for the important moments and circumstances in the lives of the Chosen people.

The deeper interior motivation appropriate to such abstinence from certain foods and drink was intended to redirect a prayerful person's thinking toward God's holiness and justice. Concentration upon the righteousness of God diminished one's preoccupation with petty selfish concerns. Fasting, coupled with thoughtful reflection, permitted one to see more clearly the weak and often fragile nature of one's relationship toward God and one's fellowmen. Purposeful fasting engendered a recognition of the need to be purified from prejudices and narrowness of vision before placing one's self in the presence of a Provident Father's loving kindness. Fasting encouraged a deep desire for forgiveness of failings, and fortified determination to change the direction of one's life.

Down through the ages, abusive practices corrupted the original purpose intended by fasting, often to the neglect of the inner disposition of heart and the willingness to redirect interior attitudes toward God's justice.

The Slot Man

U.S. Catholic, which regularly has been asking some of the touchy questions facing Catholics these days, also manages to provide some lighter moments, witness the latest issue with its test for determining if you are a "traditional" or "renewed" Catholic.

The author, James Breig, says in prefacing the test that there is no "flip" answer. Still, as we imagine him at his typewriter we can't help but see a bulge in his cheek caused by something other than a tobacco chew.

Though not in the article itself, U.S. Catholic has sent along 10 questions for you to see if you are traditional or renewed — in case you presently have no idea. Here they are:

1. I like to be called (a) Christian (b) Catholic.

There are some very strong passages in Scripture especially recorded by the corrective but loving warnings of the prophets who condemned excessive concentration upon externals.

"Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Joel 2:12-13.

The prophet Joel, reacted against superficial fasting by challenging his audience to the deeper value of conversion of heart. Penitence as fasting is a means of responding to the deeper values of God's justice and righteousness.

Conversion of heart is the fundamental purpose of fasting. Jesus enhanced the Old Testament value of fasting by supplying a renewed sense of interior motivation. The Jewish tradition was not only continued but surpassed in its significance. An example is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. "And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Luke 6: 16-18)

Rather than emphasize the strictness inherent in fasting by measuring external standards, Jesus seemingly presented a paradoxical notion of fasting. A man could grow into a false sense of self-righteousness by permitting others to perceive and even laud his religious practices. Soon at-

tention is focused upon the external charade and not the inner challenge to grow into a false sense of self-righteousness. Jesus taught that inner strength and purpose of intention manifest themselves in a joyful countenance. The value of fasting does not rest upon the habit of self-denial, but in the underlying purpose of restoring and renewing one's relationship with God.

The early Christian churches maintained the practice of fasting as a sign of the paschal mystery and as preparation for Christ's return. Three days of fasting before baptism as a commemoration of the Lord's passion was customary for those embracing the Christian faith. In the early part of the fourth century, an intensified period of instruction was given to those desiring baptism. At this time, the traditional forty-day fast was requested of those under instruction to the faith in order that they give witness to the seriousness of their intentions. Not too long afterwards the forty-day fast was practiced by the entire Church.

In recent years a very simple but beautiful custom has become popular. The custom is the sharing meal. A group gathers together to share a meal of very simple fare, perhaps bread and soup. Through this meal, fasting is brought to its fullest significance. What may be saved in expenses through fasting is shared with those less fortunate.

"... This is the fasting that I wish... sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless..." Is. 58:7

The intensity of our care and concern for our fellowman reveals the depth of our relationship with God.

By Carmen Viglucci

How About 'None of the Above?'

2. I like (a) Tennis (b) Football.
3. I believe in (a) a guardian angel (b) a guardian Holy Spirit.
4. I attend (a) liturgy before sunset Saturday (b) Mass before 11 a.m. Sunday.
5. I watch (a) Gunsmoke (b) David R. Susskind, especially when he interviews Pentecostals.
6. I think (a) William F. Buckley ranks after the Pope in intelligence (b) the Pope ranks after myself in holiness.
7. I (a) don't know who Gary Cooper is (b) am happy that Gary Cooper converted to Catholicism before he died.
8. I (a) fall asleep during sermons (b) fall asleep during homilies.
9. I (a) light a vigil lamp during tornado watches (b) light an incense pot after meals.

10. I (a) think the last saint was Isaac Jogues (b) have proposed Ralph Nader for canonization.

Answers: The "perfect" renewed Catholic will pick answers: a,a,b,b,b,a,b,b,b. The "perfect" traditional Catholic will answer: b,b,a,a,a,a,b,a,a,a.

Personally, I came out of it shot down. I came face to face with the fact that I didn't know Gary Cooper had converted to Catholicism; I watch neither Gunsmoke nor David Susskind; I like to watch tennis and play football.

These facts about myself were disturbing but what really gave cause for worry is that I fell asleep before finishing the quiz — an old infirmity from school days. A also miss good old "C" — none of the above.

But how did you do?

Editorial

Amendment Move Gaining Momentum

A new ripple of hope has been gathering momentum among those interested in reversing the recent Supreme Court decision sanctioning abortion in the United States.

After years of opposing abortion on demand in state after state and finally reaching a stage where a measure of success was tantalizingly close (witness last year's State Legislature vote to repeal abortion on demand), right to life groups admittedly were crushed by the high court decision. It seemed that years of grinding and often unpopular work had been erased by one swift and unexpected swipe by the high court.

The first news that the only way the decision could be circumvented was through constitutional amendment left right to life's numb. The task seemed unsurmountable.

Yet human rights groups got off the floor and the work was begun. Nonetheless the task of getting two thirds of the U.S. Senate and of the House and then three fourths of the states to approve such an amendment represented a formidable task.

But there is more than one way to amend the Constitution and the other route offers heart to those who will man the phalanxes.

Two thirds of the states (34), working through their legislatures, where a majority vote in each house would suffice, can call a Constitutional Convention. Such a vote is not subject to veto by governors.

At such a convention, an amendment to the Constitution may be proposed, which then must be approved by three

fourth of the states.

There is a drawback inherent in this plan. Once a Constitutional Convention is called, the Constitution is left wide open to reinterpretation since amendments of any character and issue may be proposed.

Thus this method also has a subtle value to right to life's. Members of Congress probably would be leery of opening a full Constitutional Convention and this may give impetus to the Senate and House to get to serious work on the other avenue of amending the Constitution.

The job ahead is in no way lessened but such small rays of hope will serve to hold the momentum already effected and perhaps also may attract others who might have felt that the job loomed as impossible.