

Lenten fasting should be approached sensibly

"Portion Distribution" was the title of a recent news piece on a local television channel. The story dealt with the relationship of sound nutrition to good health; and, as its title suggest, stressed the importance of being aware of the size of the portions of food we consume at each meal. I was interested in the story because it re-connected me with some important lessons I learned in the cardiac rehabilitation program I attended last year.

At about the same time, a writer for a local newspaper wrote a delightful column about her intention to give up chocolate for Lent. According to her column the writer was raised in a Protestant household and learned about the practice of daily Lenten sacrifice from some of her school friends who were Catholic. The idea appealed to her so much that in her adulthood she remembers the lesson and continues the practice. Her column also re-connected me to an important time — to childhood when we first learned about Lent's call to conversion and repentance in preparation for the Easter feast.

The classic categories or terms we use to speak about such Lenten practices are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Prayer disposes us to open our hearts to God's constant and loving presence in our lives. Fasting connects us with the richness, rhythms and needs of our own bodies. Almsgiving orients us to our sisters and

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



brothers, especially to those (all of us!) who stand in need of the support of the community. The three of them, taken together remind us that we can not come to full stature outside of right relationship with God and neighbor.

You can guess from reading the first two paragraphs above that I have been thinking about fasting as we enter the Lenten season. I confess that that is true for a couple of reasons. One is that because of recent personal health issues, I have come to realize more sharply than ever the importance of decisions about the kind and amount of food I take into my body. The second reason (and I am sure it is related to the first) is that decisions about food have become for me a symbol of the difference between need and want. I am aware that I sometimes eat from want after my needs have been met, and that I can do this even knowing that it is not good for my health to do so.

During Lent I'll be praying for the grace to do a better job in this area and will try to observe the classic expression of Lenten fasting for adults. One simple way to do that is to enjoy one meal a day and two other meals which, taken together, equal the main meal. Exactly what amount should that be for each of us? I could not say. But I can suggest guides. The amount you consume should be enough to sustain your energy for work and all other obligations of daily life. Secondly, beware of any regimen that wears you down rather than builds you up, or makes you cranky rather than kind.

I am lucky enough to have friends who will tell me in no uncertain terms if I become showy, cranky or more eccentric than usual in any of this. We all want to move through Lent with honest hearts and by quiet practices, which express in practical, human ways the values we carry inside us.

I hope that you and your loved ones have a blessed Lent and that you will open your heart to God in ways that make sense in your life just now.

Whatever you or I may decide to do by way of Lenten practice, I know that we will be one in prayer for those preparing for baptism or to be received into the full communion of the church at the Easter vigil.

Peace to all.

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