

Lenten message from bishop Bernt Eidsvig 2013

Dear faithful!



Not long ago the Christmas season ended. On Ash Wednesday a new period of our Church year commences.

Through Christmas, God shows us how far he is willing to go in order to live in fellowship with us men. After the birth of Christ we are connected to God in a new way precisely through our humanity – and God’s humanity teaches us what it means to be a true human being. This also implies that fasting physically can bring us closer to Him who reveals His face in Jesus Christ. Consequently the body is not insignificant in our relationship with God, and from the Gospels we know that Christ himself fasted. But how come that physical fasting can bring us closer to God?

The longing for God is found in the hearts of men by nature, for man is created in God’s image and likeness. This is why Saint Augustine says to God, “You have created us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You.” Our natural longing for God is manifested in that we as men are never satisfied with what we have – we always long for something better, something bigger or something faster: a faster computer, a better car, a more athletic body, a more impressive house. This pursuit can often numb the natural longing for God in us, but short-lived happiness and satisfaction will never give us the peace and actual happiness we are pursuing. We shall only find it when our hearts are allowed to rest in God.

Physical fasting reminds us in a tangible way of our humanity and dependence on Gods gifts. By physical fasting, we are creating a space for God in our life. When we give God room, our hearts also begin expanding to include other people, for where God is, true human love is as well – the kind of love that is oriented towards the other. It is precisely this love Jesus reveals on the cross when he gives his life for us.

What kind of physical fasting we choose may vary. I would recommend that all of you decide on something specific and achievable. If your stomach should sometimes growl, then let that remind you to pray and give alms to those who since long ago have had to become

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accustomed to feeling hungry. Then fasting have already expanded your heart expand. If you have an expensive habit, then you could spend less on it, or give it up entirely during Lent. That way you may let others share in your wealth. As always, I would especially recommend Caritas yearly Lenten project.

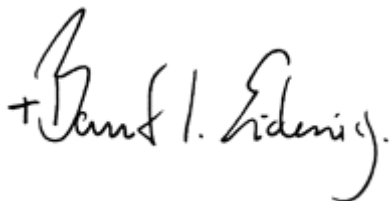
But one who merely gives money, gives too little. To give is about so much more than money – no one is so poor that he has nothing to give. You can share more of your time with others. This is because most of us have “time burglars” in our life, be it an excessive watching of television, internet use, or perhaps exercise. How about turning off the TV, and calling someone you know is sitting at home alone instead? How about refraining from checking your email in the evening in order to be mentally present with your loved ones? Or how about not using the smartphone before you go out the door in the morning, so that you may lower your shoulders and have time for a short prayer? By throwing out the time burglars we are creating the time and space needed to seek God.

The noise of this world can put obstacles in the way of healthy and deep human reflection. The demon “Screwtape” in the C. S. Lewis classic “The Screwtape letters” describes noise as the devil’s best weapon against “silly qualms, despairing scruples, and impossible desires”.

Not all are afforded the luxury of being able to seek out a quiet place, but I would advise those of you who can, to try.

Let us practice being present this Lent. We can all become better at being genuinely present – to God, to others and in our own lives.

I wish you all a blessed Lent.



+ Bernt Eidsvig.