

Sanctification and Fasting

Objectives

To understand the relationship between sanctification and fasting, and how to sanctify our fasting

References

- ❖ The Spirituality of Fasting by HH Pope Shenouda the III

Scriptural Verse

- ❖ “Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord” (Joel 1: 14)
- ❖ “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?” (Isaiah 58: 6, 7)

Lesson Outlines

What is Sanctification?

Sanctification is a devotion or dedication

- ❖ “Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the wombIt is Mine” (Exodus 13: 2). So, the first born of men were dedicated to serve God before the chosen Aaron and the first born of the animals were sacrificed to the Lord.
- ❖ “So they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons that he may minister to Me as priest” (Exodus 28: 5). These garments were dedicated only for the service and could not be used otherwise. The same thing is applied to all that belongs to the service: Censor- incense- utensils- Coverings....
- ❖ Also the tenth, the prime, the vows and all the offerings are sanctified or dedicated to God “there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the first fruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things” (Ezekiel 20: 40).

The Relationship between Sanctification and Fasting

Joel the prophet said: “Consecrate a fast”, meaning that the days of fasting should be consecrated to God or dedicated to Him. They are not for the world. But as we cannot leave our works and have a sacred assembly, let us dedicate some of the time or at least dedicate the goal of fasting so as all our deeds in this period would be dedicated to God.

Is there a fasting not consecrated to God?

Many fasting are not consecrated to God

- ❖ Those who fast but never change but remain the same with all their wickedness.
- ❖ Those who fast as a routine fearing for their reputation as servants.
- ❖ Those who fast only by their body without any share for their Spirit.
- ❖ Those who deprive themselves from food but enjoy other lusts in their life.

Many Fasting are rejected and in vain

- ❖ Apparent and shown fasting to get honor and praise (Matthew 6: 16-18).
- ❖ Fasting with pride and judging others (Luke 18: 9- 14).
- ❖ Fasting with an evil goal (Acts 23: 12, 13).
- ❖ Fasting of sinful people who live in impurity and refuse to repent (Jeremiah 14: 11, 12).
- ❖ Fasting without charity even if it is with affliction of soul (Isaiah 58: 3- 7).
- ❖ Fasting that is not for the sake of God: a diet for looking better or for health reason; abstaining from food as a revolt or for sadness...

The Aim of Fasting

- ❖ We do not fast to deprive and humiliate our body, but to get a spiritual release.
- ❖ We do not fast to satisfy ourselves or get honor from others that lead to vain glory.
- ❖ We do not fast because it is the rite of the church. It is beautiful to follow the church but make sure to enter with the church in its spiritual depth.
- ❖ We fast because we love God. For His sake we eat to be strong enough to serve Him and fulfill our spiritual duties and for His sake we fast to have control over our bodies.
- ❖ We try to be close to God and we don't want to be stumbled by the body.
- ❖ We try to get above the body and the matter to enjoy the love of God.
- ❖ Fasting gets us closer to God through prayers, spiritual readings, watching, kneeling and self discipline that lead us to repentance and reconciliation with God.

Conclusion

The Spiritual fasting is that one in which you feel the presence of God deeply in your life. It is the sanctified period owned by God and is dedicated in full to Him. The presence of God is obvious in all your deeds. Your relationship with Him grows everyday during fasting and you enjoy His presence in your life to the point that you wish the fasting never ends.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. What did the Lord mean when He said “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself” (John 17: 19)
2. What are ways we can prepare ourselves spiritually for a period of fasting?
3. What are common pitfalls that make us lose the spirituality of our fasting?