

LENT 2017 – day 2 – 3rd March

I mentioned yesterday that perseverance is the key. We are on our second day, and many are back but I can still see that some have dropped from yesterday. ☺ Perseverance, working through it and making it a habit changes everything. If you do something for 21 days continuously, it becomes a habit. You don't have to do bad habits for 21 days, you can do it for 2-3 and pick it up.

Today the theme is: **Fasting and Feasting.** Every year the readings are the same:

Isaiah 58:1-2

Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.

If you put this text together, the meaning is very simple: We can do a lot of religious activities without changing the motives of our life. Some of us can go on for years like that. We attend the regular services, say your prayers, do all the religious activities but remain unchanged in the heart. That's what Isaiah is complaining about.

Isaiah was 2500 years ago and he is telling us there is a big problem:

People think they are following God because they're doing all the religious activities, but in actual fact, their inner motives and nature remains the same.

It can happen to all of us. We can follow the rituals and believe that it's okay and there is nothing to change inside us. I can see the same thing in the Protestant tradition. They say salvation is by faith. If you believe then how you live doesn't matter. There are people among us who say if you do the rituals right then how you live doesn't matter. Both are the same and both have this problem of their motives and nature remaining untouched.

When we were children, my grandmother used to go an hour before mass to sit in the church. She had the front pew and her name was written on it and she looked pretty holy as well - until someone other than a family member came to sit on that pew. All she had to do was give one look and quietly people disappeared. For her, doing it properly and right was all that mattered - how you deal with people didn't really matter.

This is something the Lord is teaching us this morning. We are living in the world, we are living with people and our spiritual journey must be reflected in our relationship with others.

So God has sent us great help spiritually by bringing into our life people who are;

- Stubborn,
- broken,
- dirty
- reactive

All of us want someone else and if we could replace them we would have taken it at once. Some people say, "I have surrendered my spouse to the Lord." ☺That is because you can't deal with them. God has sent them into our lives for the spiritual journey, and a lot of people don't realize that. These people are in our life to help us and enable us to walk with God. Unfortunately we are hoping God will take these people away and send us somebody else - better people. Of course He can't find a better you because you're the best. We say, "I have nothing much to change because even when I get angry I'm getting angry because of them. Better people will make me not angry. It's nothing for me to change, it's all about these people who really get my goat."

We have become blind. While we are saying our prayers and going through the rituals, here is the hidden part:

Isaiah 58:3

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers."

You're dealing selfishly with people, your motives aren't changing but you're praying. So you better reach into your heart.

We can do a 40 day exercise and handle the people in your life without losing your head.

That's what you mean by growing. You don't want to change any of them, but you handle them deep within yourself. There is going to be a great victory over the 40 days if you do this. God is sending people and whomever He sends, we handle them.

Fasting is denying ourselves

- The urge to tell them off,
- The urge to let them have it,
- The urge to push them out.

There are so many people to whom we say, "I wish I could tell them how they should change, I wish I could put them in the right place."

Today we can start by handling within ourselves whomever He sends, whatever the circumstances by fasting on our nature and accepting them from the hands of God.

- It will do your blood pressure a world of good,
- it will bring inner peace and freedom.

A lot of us don't have that because we are fighting the whole world. We are fighting against people and against circumstances. The name for that is, 'Chuk, chik, chook.' The three sounds of annoyance. In the morning when you get up you make these sounds and from morning to night you're like that. You think you'll escape in your sleep but in the sleep you're going through the whole thing.

This happens because we are assuming that the changes all have to happen outside. A lot of people live and die that way without realizing the simple answer is in the fasting. Fast on your expectations, fast on your motives, receive the people that are sent into your life from the hands of the Lord. Struggling to accept them into your heart takes you into the journey within.

Once you begin to realize you have to accept them, then you begin to realize the problem lies within you.

We have issues that prevent us from accepting them. It is coming out from within us.

- Sometimes resentment,
- Sometimes resistance,
- Sometimes reactions,
- Sometimes annoyance.

The easiest thing is to fix that external thing without allowing the Lord to reveal the brokenness within you. **When you bring out the brokenness within you, your fasting has become a great help.**

Of course you can fast from food but food fasting alone is not enough. Food fasting is also valuable because it is going against your natural inclinations and urges opens you to God. In the same way, resisting your natural reaction to people and resisting what comes from within yourself opens you to self-realization.

Let's look at the gospel:

Matthew 9:14-15

Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guest of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."

It looks like a contradiction of the first reading. The first reading says you must do the right fasting and Jesus is saying you're wasting your time fasting. When you go against your nature or you struggle to deal with the people that are in your life and find you're unable to do that - actually, the only answer you have is to come to the feet of Jesus.

There is a French Canadian Catholic movement called L'Arche. Its founder is someone called Jean Vanier, he is a famous layman but a living saint. He started communities for normal, healthy people who made a commitment to live in support and friendship with mentally and physically

handicapped people. It was an amazing thought that started 20-30 years ago. Normal, healthy, balanced people began a relationship with people who are unbalanced, broken and having a lot of issues. He explains what happens and says, "You first come with a sense of great satisfaction that you're making a sacrifice to help someone and serve someone."

Those who serve with us - especially the full timers - you know what I mean. Everyone becomes a full timer thinking of doing something more sacrificial for people than others. We feel a little good about doing that as well. But what happens in L'Arche is, the people whom they love and serve are people who have been rejected right from their smallest days because they were either ugly or disabled or having mental issues. So what happens is they never believe in your kindness and love. They suspect you and your motives and they give you a hard time. Your love is unappreciated, your service is not recognized and the more you serve them, the harder they push back at you.

He says, "That's when we discovered that our good intentions are not good enough. That drives us to the feet of Jesus." As you are driven to the feet of Jesus because you're desperate about these people and unable to deal with them - you discover Jesus in that limitation. He is there with you. You're unable to love and serve, you're getting hurt, you're having internal woundedness coming out because of other people's behaviour and you have no answer. You go to the feet of Jesus and you find peace and consolation - not from people now, but from Jesus.

What has happened to you then is that you have discovered the bridegroom. Your curse has been turned into a blessing. Your sadness has been turned into the wedding feast - because in that struggle you have found Him.

How many people are angry with me and tell me, "You don't fix things." I don't fix things with a purpose. Each of us is asking to fix things from our brokenness. "Please tell so-and-so to shut up; their mouth is the real problem in this office." If we sort it out at the human level and say, "Please shut up," what happens to the person who shuts up? The steam starts building inside, they start manifesting, push this here, push that there. Then that person says, "These people don't understand me at all. I came to serve the Lord and they're crucifying me."

This is the inner journey. Things will be dissatisfied until you discover the bridegroom. Suddenly, at the feet of Jesus you receive an inner revelation and His consolation. Because of that brokenness you have found consolation directly from the Lord. After some time you begin to see the problem is yours. I'm unable to deal with the brokenness of the other. If I grow into that place where I am free, I become internally free and a space begins to happen within us. In that space, even the most broken person is touched and changed. That's how a family grows into maturity - husbands and wives. The husband changes from deep within to accept the brokenness of the wife, and in that struggle comes face to face with their own brokenness. What do you do then? Allow Jesus to minister to you. When you find consolation and freedom from Him inside you, your internal freedom will raise the spouse to another level. Little by little, the beauty of the kingdom begins to be manifested in that family.

We have a naïve, juvenile, immature vision of relationships. "You love me, I

love you, I look at your eyes and you look at mine, let's hold hands and live together forever." It doesn't work. Fasting and going against your nature without trying to fix people all the time. People don't come and complain that they're unable to love so-and-so and deal with their weakness. Instead they say, "Please fix so-and-so. Is this the inner journey? See what they are doing to me!"

When we became full timers, we took on the commitment to receive the full dose of it and you find the bridegroom in the struggle. Many of us escape by trying to do an external ministry that satisfies us. "Everyone appreciates what I am doing over there." I am not living with them, but I go there once a month. "Oh how they love me! I wish I could stay with them." But the same thing will happen there as well. This is a journey into yourself and a journey into the heart of God.

Find the bridegroom, because when you find the bridegroom, every disaster has been turned into a blessing.

I can see the lady who gave the testimony of how she came to the CRL way of life through the murder of her husband. That is a tragedy and a terrible experience - but it led her subsequently to find the bridegroom. When you find the bridegroom, even that terrible event has been turned into a blessing. If that can be turned into a blessing, I can't see why our petty issues can't be. "So-and-so doesn't understand me, so-and-so is always reacting to me." The problem isn't theirs. Of course they have problems but let God deal with them - you and I aren't God. Let's deal with it within ourselves.

Even as we work with the church, this is my own internal attitude and approach. Let anyone resist and be against us in any way they can - but we will walk internally with the Lord. Our Father in heaven is above and therefore, He will open the necessary doors, and if He closes a door then I'll take it from His hands. Those days I lost a lot of internal freedom by that - I was angry, judgmental and reactive. Now I can tell you I'm really internally at peace because however people act or react, God will find a way to make His way possible.

My problem is, when I start acting and thinking in the flesh, I'm not allowing God's way to be manifested. I'm learning - when I lose my freedom, I spend more time in the presence of the Lord so that I will cooperate with Him rather than block Him by bringing out my broken nature.