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Fasting will draw you closer to God

Once a year Christians spend forty days preparing for Easter. To imitate our Lord's fast in the desert, the early Christians fasted from food and drink in the traditional fashion. This meant having only one meal a day.

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Is fasting one of those ancient practices we can set aside today? Definitely not! But, I would add that many people need to fast more from

entertainment than food and drink. Their lives are so busy with television, radio, movies and social networking that they have forgotten how to be alone with God in the silence of personal prayer.

The kind of fasting best for one person might be spiritually useless for another. For some Christians, the best fast they could do for the forty days of Lent would be to give up drinking beer. For other Christians, who live in a state of perpetual dieting, “fasting” is not going to bring them closer to God.

It is up to each individual to choose some means of self-denial that will purify the soul. For many, it will mean turning off the TV to find time for prayer.

We are preparing for Easter. A lot depends on how we prepare. We can look at Easter as a weekend in April when we all go on holiday. Or we can

look at it the way the early Christians did. The real Easter is not a weekend dedicated to parties. The real Easter is a resurrection.

We need two kinds of resurrection. The first is a spiritual resurrection. Our soul is dead because of sin. Our soul rises from the dead when we ask for mercy and God forgives our sins. As St Paul explained, “We were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

This first resurrection cannot take place until we do penance. “I treat my body hard and make it obey me,” St Paul wrote, “because, after preaching to others, I should not want to be disqualified.”

The second resurrection is the resurrection of the body. Again, it is St Paul who describes it: “We are

waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his own glorious body.”

This explains the purpose of fasting. We need to prepare ourselves to see God face to face. We need to moderate our desire for pleasure—even for something as necessary as eating—to prepare ourselves for a different world. “For the kingdom of God does not consist of food and drink but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation in March 2011.

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