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Monday's Gospel: To Enjoy God's Presence

Gospel for Monday in the 2nd Week of Ordinary Time, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mk* 2:18-22)

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them,

they cannot fast. The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but new wine is for fresh skins.”

Commentary

Fasting is a way of praying with the body. The “emptiness” that we experience in our bodily being helps us to remember that the most critical “emptiness” is that of the absence of God. Fasting (and in general all forms of abstinence) spurs us to desire God’s presence in our life more

intensely, so that we quench our longing for plenitude only in Him.

A fast that prevents us from enjoying God's closeness would make no sense. Jesus' words in today's Gospel passage help us to realize this. That is why his disciples do not fast in the same way as the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees. Jesus' disciples already experience the joy of living with the Son of God, while the others have not yet discovered it.

A sign of the arrival of Messianic times was the presence of abundance. We see this, for example, in the especially good wine at the wedding in Cana, and in the plentiful loaves and fishes that Jesus provided for the crowd. Christ's disciples experienced that feeling of well-being when they were with Him. Just as we do when we celebrate a feast day in a special way, in the beauty of

worship, in an especially good meal. All of this is something good.

But our Lord adds: “The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.” The Christian life also requires times of penance, of subjecting the body in order to strengthen the desire for God. Holiness entails both hardship and abundance, but always with joy, because at all times our Lord is close to us.

When we mortify our bodies we never forget that Christ has already triumphed and that his life is in us. Therefore our mortification should be flexible and not rigid. “Sanctity has the flexibility of agile muscles. Whoever wishes to be a saint should know how to do something that involves a mortification while omitting doing something else (as long as this does not offend God) that

one would also find difficult, and giving thanks to God for this comfort . . . Sanctity is not rigid like cardboard; it knows how to smile, to give way to others and to hope. It is life: supernatural life” (Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 156).

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