

Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus

A Discipleship Journey



Sermon on the Mount

Week 19

Making Space for God

Matthew 6:16 - 18

Opening Prayer:

Loving Father,

Open my heart to the areas of my life that need to change so that I can carry out the mission you have imagined for my life. Inspire me to live my faith in ways that are dynamic and engaging.

Show me how best to get involved in the life of my parish. Make our parish community hungry for best practices and continuous learning and help us to realize that we each have a role to play in making our parish a perfect place for imperfect people trying to walk with you.

Amen

(from *Rediscover the Saints*, Matthew Kelly)

Reflection

We skip ahead a few verses this week to reflect on fasting, the third pillar or discipline in our religious life.

And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:16 - 18

Each of the three religious disciplines help transform our spiritual life: prayer frees us for God; almsgiving frees us for others; and fasting frees us from ourselves. Another way of looking at these is: what I do with God (prayer); what I do with others (almsgiving); and what I do with myself (fasting). In this week's Scripture passage, Jesus invites us to reflect on spiritual practices or disciplines, considered especially in terms of fasting.

Interestingly, Jesus never taught fasting directly, but then He never really needed to. Under the Old Testament law, the Israelites were required to fast once a year, on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), so devout Jews would have fasted once a year. In the New Testament, however, the Pharisees fasted twice a week, above and beyond what they were required to do, and they did so in a way that *everyone* knew about it. As we have reflected these past two weeks on how Jesus viewed such a public display of spiritual practices, little more needs to be said on that topic.

Fasting is something Catholics are encouraged to do during the season of Lent. But what exactly is fasting? Fasting is basically going without, most typically food. We may already fast for a variety of secular reasons: medical tests, health reasons, or weight loss. The biblical notion of fasting, however, adds a spiritual purpose to the fast – we go without as a way of humbling ourselves before God.

As with any spiritual discipline, fasting is a means to an end, not an end in itself. In other words, spiritual disciplines are tools to help deepen our relationship with God. Through fasting, we go without food to create openness in our bodies for God. Through contemplation, our hearts become accessible and, through silence, we are better able to listen. We study the Scripture to free our minds to a deeper understanding of God's Word. We are reminded through our spiritual practices that only God can fill the deepest desires or longings of our hearts; we are empty without God and only God can fill the emptiness. The hope is that throughout the practice our attention remains on God, and that we invite God's deepening presence in our lives. By keeping our focus on God, our hearts are transformed, and we grow as disciples.

Reflection Question: What spiritual practices help me make space for God, and what can I do to make these practices part of my daily routine?

Closing Prayer

Speak to Jesus about what is on your heart, then rest in silence for a few moments listening for His response.