

"Often during Lent, my mind turns to the reading from the prophet Isaiah that ends with the simple question: Is this not the sort of fast that pleases me? (Isaiah 58:6). God evidently wants a broken, humble heart, because he says, Rend your hearts and not your garments (Joel 2:13). God wants not so much a giving up as a simple giving. In order to really have an open and humble heart, to give lavishly of food, love, shelter, tenderness and compassion because of this humble heart, one must give up oneself. To fast the way the Lord wants means a total surrender of self to the other and for the other.

The Lenten season is a good time to examine ourselves.

Perhaps food is not our god, yet we can worship our will, which feeds our ego out of all proportion. Perhaps in the depths of our souls we might be unforgiving, hostile, angry. These are shameful things, if directed toward our neighbor.

Maybe I am not too concerned with things of the world, but very much concerned with "my thing," my desires, and very little concerned with other people's needs.

Lent is the time to find out, because when we have broken and opened our hearts, God comes.

What is a broken, humble heart? There is a story in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17:7-16) where a prophet went to a widow who had only a little oil and a little flour.

He told her to make him a cake from it. She gave it all to him and as a result her oil lasted her a lifetime.

Have we got a heart of stone? Do we need a mallet to break it? If we do not have an open heart, we must break it open with some tool or instrument. Then the oil of love, tenderness, compassion, acceptance of the other as he is, watchfulness and alertness for the other, will pour out of us like oil from the pitcher of that widow of Zaraphath. The oil will never run dry, and the number of people at the table will not be a concern, because there will be enough love, tenderness, and compassion for everyone who comes.

Such is the fast that God wants. I give up myself without ever forgetting that I must love myself. And I love myself by giving of myself. Greater love has no man than he lay down his life for his brethren (Jn 15:13).

So if I lay down my life for my brethren, I fulfill the second great commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. I am loving myself rightly when I am laying down my life for the other.

It is such a gentle thing, that giving up—adjusting to what the other wants, not what I want or am interested in. In giving gladly to others, a ripple like sunshine or moonlight on water passes through your life, like a golden or silver thread. And you are not worried about anything.

Who is ever worried when they are in love? Rather simple, this “fasting” for the Lord. Simple, but, like all things of God, immense. That is the paradox of the Lord.

Of course, in trying to have a broken heart, it does not do any harm to abstain a little from food and a little from drink—to do a few penances and an awful lot of praying. It helps!”