



The Mar Thoma Church Diocese of North America & Europe Christian Education Forum

Lenten Meditations

RENEWAL: FASTING VS. FASHION

Read: Isaiah 58: 1-14

Fasting is Justice and Righteousness.

Isaiah 58 address the spirit of fasting with an emphasis on clarifying what constitute true righteousness (V 2). Key words in chapter 58 is justice and righteousness. Seeking and knowing God's way is reminiscent to doing righteousness and justice. Fasting was practiced during the exilic period from Zechariah; the same tone is adopted here. Fasting cannot be mechanized, for it will devolve into mere ceremony without proper consequence. Here fasting is not rejected by the prophet but the behavior associated with the improper fasting.

The first four verses (6-9) designate the proper fruit of fasting; God took no notice of the people (V3). God will answer and be available – but only when proper righteousness is manifested, and not hypocrisy. Healing will come when the fruit of proper devotion is in evidence.

Fasting is meant to be a response of penitence and contrition, seeking God's favor. Such attitudes are inconsistent with oppression and disregard for those in need.

Fasting is not fashion.

Nowadays we hear more about meditation, yoga, dieting etc. Very often religious practice like lent observation is considered as something better for our body beautification this is cosmetic spirituality than an inward spiritual change. Here prophet reminds us that our fasting/lent and other mode of spiritual practices are meaningless fashion if we are not seeking justice and righteousness.

"One should get the priorities right before observing lent. Lent is not a time when we just cut our weight, lent is not just a time to look good and healthy outside. Rather lent is a time to accept everyone as they are, lent is a time when we stop judging, lent is an opportunity to feel beautiful inside and make others feel the same way, lent is a time to be natural, normal and moderate" (Fr. Jerry Kuriakos)

As the chapter closes, it is clear that the issue of social justice, religious observance, daily relations and Sabbath obedience are woven together, and together they constitute what the prophet understand as practicing true righteousness (2). When fasting becomes fashion we slim both inside and outside, when fasting become righteousness and justice we enrich each other.

"Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (Isaiah 58.7)

PRAYER: Lord, help us to practice our religion by participating with people in need. Amen.

Rev. Mathew Varghese, New York

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Isaiah 58:7*