



LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS

A Column by Fr. Tom

Fasting: Good for Me? Good for You?

In our last column, we discussed the answers to three of four questions: What is fasting? Why do we fast? Why should we fast? That leaves us with only one question: How can fasting change our lives and the lives of others?

In fact, we also began to look at how fasting can change our lives. I mentioned how fasting can help us regain control over foods and activities that might have started to have control over us. For example, if someone *must* have several cups of coffee to get through the day, it may be time to see how one can live with less caffeine or none at all. Also, certain activities might have turned into habits, or even addictions. For example, if I *must* play solitaire on my tablet until I win before I can go to bed, it might be an indication that this activity has gone from a pastime and relaxation to a disordered compulsion. Fasting from foods or activities over which we do not have control might help us to regain control. Fasting also helps us to regain control over our need for instant gratification. By delaying gratification, we learn a basic spiritual principle – reaching toward a higher goal – most importantly, the goal of reaching toward Heaven. The things of this world cannot compare to the treasures we will have in Heaven.

However, one of the greatest advantages of fasting is that it allows us the opportunity to get beyond ourselves. First of all, fasting from

certain behaviors allows us more time or freedom to spend with others. One concrete example might be that I will have more time to spend with my family, if I give up my nightly solitaire tournament.

Fasting can help us connect with others in another way. For example, if I fast from food one day a week, during that day I will feel hunger pangs. I can either focus on my pain or I can realize that there are some people who are not hungry by choice. I can then allow my hunger pangs to help me feel compassion for those who will go without proper nutrition. Then, hopefully, I will act out of that compassion. I will pray for them and I will contribute to a cause that provides food to the hungry.

People who like to exercise will often use the phrase, “No pain, no gain.” I prefer to change it just a little: **Know** pain, **know** gain. If you can feel a similar pain from which others might suffer, such as hunger, then you will hopefully do what you can to help them “gain” against their need and no longer feel that pain.

It is from this place of compassion that we begin to find a reason for almsgiving – the third Lenten practice, which will be the topic of our next column.