

Ashes, physically marked, a sign of repentance, points to your death. You are dying, as you must, because you're a sinner. So much for your ambitions, your accomplishments, your wealth. Your sin, goes far deeper than your behavior to the very heart and soul of you. Conceived and born in sin, you are unholy and unclean, not only at odds with God but unable, unwilling to seek Him out or draw near to Him. And yet, because you cannot escape His presence, His holiness consumes you. Above all, the holiness of the Lord is mercy, compassion, that is, His desire to forgive. So He does not allow death to be or to have the last word, but He takes death itself into His hands to become the remedy and solution to your sin. This is all spiritual nature but extremely physical.

When you fast, Jesus instructed. The German word for Lent is *Fastenzeit*, literally, "fasting time." Germans are usually wrong, but they get this right. *Fastenzeit*, fasting time. In our fast-food, have-it-now culture, the idea of fasting is very strange. **When you fast**, Jesus says, **do not be like the hypocrites. When, not if, you fast.** Fasting is just strange, seems too physical to be spiritual.

Fasting, can involve abstaining, from diet sodas, alcohol, chocolate, deserts during these 40 days, but foremost fasting involves hunger, from food during periods of time. What does abstaining, a rumbling belly have to do with your piety, with your Christian devotion?

Why fast? Jesus fasted. Scripture shows periods of preparation and repentance marked by fasting. The Church has always encouraged it. Luther encouraged it, even there in the Catechism. Our confessions, in accord with Scripture show fasting, abstaining of special foods is to be done rightly for personal piety, personal training, reflection while it does not earn us anything from God, does not earn God's forgiveness or favor, it's good for us -to help focus on the Lord's kingdom.

Why fast? Jesus says **when you fast**. It always goes back to Jesus. Behold the man! Our God is a man, unites the physical with the spiritual. He fulfills all the hunger pains of His people since the Garden of Eden. There, in the garden, hunger was divinely instilled for trusting in their Creator for daily provision. But disordered hunger led them astray.

Consider how fasting can help guard you against that age-old temptation of being too spiritual. The temptation is as old as creation. Adam and Eve, give in to the spiritual desire to be like God, over the physical prohibition against eating from that one tree, they set the pattern

for the rest of us, who want to prefer the spiritual over the material. In the OT, God's people often abandon the very physical worship of the Lord alone for more spiritual worship, like with the Baals and Asherah. Nicodemus quips that true religion could never be so physical as to involve rebirth. The Sadducees concocted their ridiculous story about the woman who married seven brothers to prove spiritual over physical resurrection.

Today people still insist they're spiritual but not religious which is one of the most foolish, unscriptural advice out there. Also like. 'You don't have to go to church to be a Christian'. All of that is an attempt to substitute safer, spiritual platitudes for real physical, fleshly realities. And how about those who deny the physical Lord in the Supper and say its only spiritual. And it's all sin.

God isn't like that. In His kingdom, in Scripture the spiritual is physical. The incarnation has been in His mind from before the first words of creation. Jesus fasted. For you.

Like fasting, Lent is strange, off from the world. Who has time or patience for special season of repentance, for subdued joy, to discipline the physical body, for more time in Scripture and prayer from their way-too-busy schedule?

Look at you. Honestly look at yourself this Lent. You are not to be defined by your belly, your appetite for pleasures. To fast is an exercise of self-denial, a conscious, deliberate resisting of your fleshly appetites.

So fast freely. Fast to discipline and chasten your flesh. Fast so that, as you learn to control -not only your belly -but your flesh. Fast and let the rumbling of hunger teach you that your belly is not your God. Pray until you realize that your schedule is not your God, your time is not your own, your daily bread does not come from the work of your own hands.

By fasting, you train yourself to hunger, not for the food that perishes, but for every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and for the Living Bread with which He feeds you from heaven.

Then break the fast. Eat. Drink at His altar, for the forgiveness of sins, with His physical flesh and blood. Let your abstaining from things and the growling of your belly in Lent and anytime lead you here, to the place where the Lord bids you to fast and hunger no more. Be physically joined to Him. Here is food that endures to eternal life, drink for your deepest thirst.