

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Ash Wednesday  
February 17, 2021

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Compare the fast described in the 58<sup>th</sup> Chapter of *Isaiah* with the invitation of Our Lord Jesus in *Saint Matthew* Chapter Eleven. How different they are! In the Old Testament the fast involved the *breaking of the yoke*, and bondage to evil ways. But Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us: “*Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for my yoke is easy and My burden light, and you will find rest for your souls.*”

Lent 2021 is one installment of our lifelong reply to Our Lord’s invitation. This season will be a time of special discipline. But the result of truly Christian discipline is always *liberty*. A right use of Lent brings liberty from the bonds of our own sins and shortcomings. And in that liberty we can serve Christ as He ought to be served.

That is the principle behind our observance of Lent. We are to take the yoke of Christ upon us and learn of Him. We are to concentrate upon Him instead of upon ourselves. All the efforts of self-denial: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, will necessarily be shaped by our different circumstances and needs. This involves some self-examination and assessment. But our self-denials find their meaning when our focus and motivation is on Jesus. And our subsequent joy is when we have something to offer the One we say we love.

The pandemic protocols in place just now will contribute to making your observance of the season an *interior living for God*. He will know what you are doing! To all others you will show the ordinary outward forms of cheerfulness. Remember that any rule of life which finds a feeling of superiority over others is quite useless. That is because pride hinders our learning of the One Who told us He is meek and lowly in heart.

If it has been a good Lent, forty days from now you will not sigh in relief and say “thank goodness it’s over!” Lent will have made you a better and more consistent Christian disciple. When Easter comes, the spiritual gains will be abiding. This is as it should be. Our Christian duty is to continuing growing in the faith and fear of the Lord, by our response to the work of His Holy Spirit in our lives.

In the gospel at Mass on Ash Wednesday we hear about the three notable duties of prayer fasting and almsgiving. But Lenten discipline is not the source of these

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directions. They are the Epiphany gifts of the three kings, as refined by the Cross of Christ. Those kings brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These offerings were symbols of the life of this newborn Divine King. But we who know His Cross and Resurrection realize our gifts must involve a spiritual sacrifice. Ever since Calvary we must be like King David, unwilling to offer to the Lord without cost to ourselves. So for gold we offer *alms*. For frankincense we offer *prayer*. For the gift of myrrh we *fast*. In these ways we offer ourselves in response to the great love of Jesus Christ for us. And that is in response to His great invitation: “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for my yoke is easy, and My burden light, and you will find rest for your souls.” The gospel is quite clear about this. We will find our rest in Jesus Christ and in no place else.