

## **Fasting as a Tool of Perfection**

“A worker,” notes Saint John Cassian, “takes the trouble to get hold of the instruments that he requires. He does so not simply to have them and not use them. Nor is there any profit for him in merely possessing the instruments. What he wants is, with their help, to produce the crafted objective for which these are the efficient means. In the same way, fasting, vigils, scriptural meditation, nakedness, and total deprivation do not constitute perfection but are the means to perfection. They are not in themselves the end point of a discipline, but an end is attained to through them.” And, “Fasts and vigils, the study of Scripture, renouncing possessions and everything worldly are not in themselves perfection, as we have said; they are its tools. For perfection is not to be found in them; it is acquired through them. It is useless, therefore, to boast of our fasting, vigils, poverty, and reading of Scripture when we have not achieved the love of God and our fellow men. Whoever has achieved love has God within himself and his intellect is always with God.”

Saint John Kolovos counsels as follows: “If a king wanted to take possession of his enemy’s city, he would begin by cutting off the water and the food and so his enemies, dying of hunger, would submit to him. It is the same with the passions of the flesh; if a man goes about fasting and hungry, the enemies of his soul grow weak.”

Saint Makarios of Egypt: “He who wants to enter the strong man’s house through the narrow gate, and to make off with his goods, must not surrender to luxury and obesity. He must strengthen himself in the Holy Spirit, having in mind the phrase that ‘flesh and blood is not able to inherit the kingdom of God [1 Cor. 15:50].’ But how should he strengthen himself in the Spirit? Here he should heed the words of Saint Paul, that God’s wisdom is regarded as foolishness by men, as well as those of Isaiah, that he had seen the Son of Man, and His form was despised, and He was forsaken by all the sons of men. Thus he who wants to be a son of God must first humble himself in the same way and be regarded as foolish and despicable, not turning his face aside when spat upon, not pursuing the glory and beauty of this world or anything of this kind, not having anywhere to lay his head, vilified, mocked, downtrodden, regarded by all as an object of contempt, attacked invisibly and visibly, yet resisting in his mind. It is then that the Son of God, Who said, ‘I will walk among you, and be your God, and ye shall be My people [Lev. 6:12],’ will become manifest in his heart. And He will receive power and strength so that he can bind up the strong man and make off with his goods, and tread upon asp and basilisk, snakes and scorpions.”

The old man, Abba Moses, was asked, “What is the good of the fasts and watchfulness which a man imposes on himself?” He replied, “They make the soul humble. For it is written: ‘Behold the lowliness of my toil, and forgive all my sins [Ps. 24:18].’ So if the soul gives itself all this hardship, God will have mercy on it.”

Source: *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, Triodion*. Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, Colorado.