

Put your best foot forward (Luk 4:1-13)

* Beloved, saying goodbye to the Epiphany Season, we've already fast forwarded our steps to the next point of our spiritual destination. Looking for the place of that point in a timeless coordinate system, we find ourselves four days after Ash Wednesday and at the first Sunday in Lent. Ahead of us is almost the 40 weekdays of fasting and penitence preparatory. Our journey will come to its end after passing the four major events: - Palm Sunday; - the Last Supper; - the cross and Jesus' death. These four major and other events from the forty days of Jesus' life serve as a prelude to his glorious Resurrection.

* Unfortunately, there is no agreement of opinion on the matter of how Christians should observe the Lent Season as well as there is no agreement on how far the disciples need to go after Jesus. As Lutherans we've been accustomed to observe Lent by emphasizing its spiritual objectives, (Isa 53:3-12). At the same time, we are not prisoners of any custom or of men's institution that teach us to abstain from food or to practice self-mortification. I knew a Christian who couldn't go without a cup of coffee but during Lent he did without. By this he demonstrated victory over his sinful flesh. Taking in consideration this mortification and some others, I thank the Lord for his humiliation that also belongs to me. Though I may not be strong enough to go without a cup of tea, even for one day; but I am still bold enough to ask my Lord for mercy, and as it pleases the Lord, to endure the shortness of my share according to his purpose.

* Significantly each year the Gospel lesson for First Sunday of Lent used to highlight the same subject, the 40 weekdays of temptation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the wilderness. Now If we consider why the Lent Season was designed as long as forty days, then we recall the Gospel for today as it says, *And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil,* (vv.1-2). As the disciples of Jesus Christ, we've decided to imitate Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness at the same period of time. But in what way are we going to imitate our Lord during this period? For instance, why not take a one-week-vacation to a summer resort in the desert?; or might we decide to read the Bible instead of watching TV; or stop eating fatty-crunchy food; or maybe sing 138 psalms in a single day.

Since there are many ideas on how to observe Lent we cannot escape a problem. From a certain point of view we must be respectful drivers, but on the other hand, we want to be smart on the same road.

* I think the best way to get a right ideas is to get with God's mind. Still we are not only saints but sinners as well since we might run fast from a criticism or might be fascinated with a false doctrine. Therefore, let's ask the rock of our salvation Jesus Christ for help and guidance. We pray, Dear Lord as the flock of your pasture we are gifted to enjoy all benefits of your holy passion that took place from the wilderness and continued up to the cross. We employ you, transform our mind and behavior into your righteous way of thinking and acting. Let us see what is wrong in us and save us from delusion regarding our self-righteousness. By your power make us able to accept these important matters in a fruitful manner, with profit to ourselves; for without you we can do nothing. Bless us to be faithful disciples to the very end so that your holy name will be glorified among us.

Amen.

* As we read our Gospel lesson we might get the impression that Satan didn't tempt Jesus during his thirty nine days of fasting until he became hungry. But (v.1) says the devil tempted Jesus all the time. Truly Jesus is God as well as he is a Man. Friends, any human need is not foreign to Jesus except for sin. He started starving from the first day as much as some of us who would be left without breakfast, lunch and dinner. But at the last day Jesus became extremely hungry. For Satan it was the last and the most favorable opportunity to interfere with the spotless but weakened human nature in Christ Jesus. He wanted to spill out dirt upon the unblemished Lamb to make him of no value. Just only imagine if at the last day Jesus would have satisfied his hunger by making bread from a rock, then his obedience to the Father would have lost its perfection. When Jesus sent the disciples on their mission, he said, *Carry no purse, no bag, no shoes*, (Luk 10:4). I believe, the same command Jesus received from his Father as he was led by the Holy Spirit. My Son, said the Father, carry no purse, no bag, no shoes *for I know what you need before you ask me*, (Mat 6:8). Significantly, the Father knew that his beloved Son didn't have a shelter, but the rocky ground was his bed. The Father knew about all the bad things in the wilderness; about heat and cold, vipers and lions and also He knew about the forty days period Jesus went without any food;

that seems toooo much! But Jesus is the one and only one Son whom the Father begot, not made, whom the Father love so much!!! You know, the help came down when the last temptation was over, *Then the devil left him, and behold! angels came and began ministering to him,* (Matt 4:11). In fact, the Father's help came always immediately, never too late. See, this is how perfect obedience and perfect love work out our salvation!

* Now ask yourselves, in what way should we respond after hearing this truth? Do we like to imitate our Lord in abstaining from dishes, or to imitate him in submission to the Father; or don't we care? In response to these questions Jesus quoted (Deut 8:3), *that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.* Significantly, even though Jesus did fast forty days, yet there is no word of his requiring to do the same and fast as he did, said M. Luther. Moreover, Christ did many other things, which he wishes us not to do; but whatever he calls us to do we have to.

* Now let us see how we are supposed to fast in connection with the will of the Father as He said, *This is my beloved Son: hear him,* (Luk 9:35). The teaching about fasting is found throughout (Mat 6). The main purpose of fasting it seems is in attempting to help a man flee from anxiety. Depending on the country, people's nervousness are different but in general all people worry about their life. What will we eat tomorrow ask Ethiopians?, or Sir, is it true that our retirement plans can be terminated, say Americans? As Christians we have the Father who art in Heaven; He knows the needs of each of us as well as He had knew the needs of his only Son Jesus Christ. Remember, as Jesus was helped and served immediately after the last temptation, so we are helped and served; significantly the Father's help never comes late but in time. The only things we need in response to our Father's care is to trust, believe and obey His Son. *O you of little faith? ... do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* says Jesus, *Don't be like the Gentiles who seek after all these things. See, your heavenly Father knows that you need also. But pay attention God's word and go all-out for righteousness, and all these things will be added to you,* (paraphrase of Matt 6:31-33). And by the way in order to receive a reward keep your fasting in secret, (Mat 6:2-3,16-18).

* The other interesting things about our fasting do deals with the way of approaching its purposes.

In (Mat 6:2,3) we infer that fasting is a giving to the needy, money or shoes, or food; just whatever the needy need. Also when we fast we pray the Father to help us to be indifferent with respect money. We are forbidden to serve god- mammon that is the personification of wealth. When we fast, we should ask the Father to help us be successful in giving up our selfishness, greediness, and so forth. There are some other passages in the Bible that teach us the way of true fasting, as for example, in Isaiah 58:3-14. In short, God said through Isaiah that his people are not rewarded for their fasting because instead of doing mercy, justice and charity they humble themselves with self-mortifications. They ran fast with their businesses and forgot to worship the Lord; at the same time they continued to worship idols.

* As far as we've already gone through all the chief points of Jesus' temptations and ours mortifications, we are ready to say the last word. The Word of God teaches clearly there are no rewards from fasting if people abandon love, faith and hope. Fasting can be beneficial spiritually and even physically, but its best results can be achieved when our fasting goes beyond our self- personal purposes to the acts of kindness, charity, justice, and generosity. Beloved let our fasting please God in ways of truth and righteous.

And God in Christ be with you always.

Amen