

*Set your heart for the Lord.* (Ash Wednesday).

\* The song we've just heard is about a man's soul longing for the unity with Christ.

In the end you've heard *Alleluia* sounded in penitential spirit. Traditionally it is not proper to sing *Alleluia* during Lent Season, even with the mourning voice. But this *Alleluia* is exceptional, it was sung by the man in advance, with anticipation to be freed from his present affliction. The man believes that some will hear the cry of his soul, and response on it adequately. Together they will lament and bow before the Lord with anticipation to be united in one body with Him, and when it will take place, they will sing the joyful *Alleluia*.

\* It is normal when our souls long for unity with our Creator, because our new born nature cannot find the rest and peace except in Him. And if it is so, then how can we receive these great blessings, you may ask? The Scripture teaches that fasting draws us near to God!

While fasting, people hope and believe that the Lord will respond to their physical and spiritual needs. In connection with the needs of believers, the Church leads its members to unite in fasting within the forty days of Season of Lent. It begins on Ash Wednesday, followed by the Five Sundays of Lent, and then the Holy Week which ends with the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord. At this First Day of Lent we are going to recall several things regarding fasting.

\* It was a bitter time when Jesus departed from the disciples. When it had happened they mourned and fasted until the Lord rose from the dead. In Mat 9:15 Jesus foretold that during certain days He will be taken away from them, that time they will fast. About this event all Gospels witness with one accord, and the disciples mourned with fast. But this period was shortened within three days. Scripture and the Spirit witness that on the third day Christ rose from the dead. We confess this truth many times during Easter Season, saying responsively, "Christ is

risen -- He is risen indeed.” No doubt Jesus died - but on the third day he rose from the dead. Thereby, our lamentation regarding Jesus’ death on the cross is artificial rather than natural. Instead of mourning we should rejoice! But due to of the reality of death our lamentations are not artificial. The physical absence of the kingdom of God and our personal weakness give reason for the mourning and fasting solemnly.

\* Now I want shift the focus from Jesus to people. Certainly there is something wrong with people in general and this causes problems in their busy lives. The problems may produce frustrations and sadness. I mean any failures in business, health, relations with other people and so on. We all will die at a certain point, with some degree of uncertainty, including us who are given to believe in Jesus Christ, but because of our imperfect faith it may not reduce our mourning. This fact should be the main point of Christian mourning, when we decide to share this common sadness in the company other penitential believers. In fact, we should not weep about Jesus suffering on the cross, but we should be weeping about our own sinfulness, longing for the restoration from this fallen state.

\* Nevertheless, we are not helpless. God knows everything. He gave us healing. The Scripture opens our eyes to what God likes in order to pleased him. The ancient church teaches us that fasting is very important, (Acts 10:30; 13:2; 14:23; and I Corinthians 7:5). Fasting draws us closer to Jesus Christ in order to be heard, receiving guidance and release from despair. \*

Now let’s review the things that teach us how we can please God. First, fasting means more than abstinence from food. Scriptural teachings say that fasting always involves moral applications. Our prayers are an important part in fasting as well as confession, remission of

sins and the performance of all kinds righteous acts and charity. Thus Isa 58 says: *Is not this the fast that I choose: to lose the bonds of wickedness, ... to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' .... And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.* In addition to that Mat 6 says that our fasting should be hidden from public eyes, because we want to receive the help from God, not from the government. We should not desire to be praise by men but we expect to receive a reward with our Heavenly Father. Whatever we contribute to the poor or to the church, we do so secretly, *And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you,* (Mat 6:18). Finally, we should fast cheerfully and with the hope to be heard and healed. Likewise Job, even in the midst of his suffering he remained cheerful and faithful. In conclusion, ask the Lord to help you to make this Lent Season the time of realization of your noble goals, the time of receiving guidance and help. May this Lent Season rewards us with forgiveness of our sins and inward joy, experiencing the steadfast love of our Lord Jesus, and growth in our faith. Thinking back to the man who is longing to sing "Alleluia", we express the same feeling as soon as we realize that after mourning we hope for the restoration our mortal bodies in eternity, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.