

Fasting, Because Adam Didn't

By Fr. Daniel Merz

Fasting, which is required of Catholics on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, has biblical roots. Our fall from grace happened when Adam and Eve broke the fast, and a key moment in our restoration to grace occurred when Christ fasted for 40 days in the desert.

Humanity's first sin involved eating. God had proclaimed a fast from the fruit of only one tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and Adam and Eve broke it. All of us, in Adam and Eve, rejected a life dependent on God alone for one that was dependent on "bread alone" instead. The tragedy is not so much that Adam and Eve ate food, but that they ate the food for its own sake, apart from God and to gain independence from him. They believed the deceiving serpent's message that food had life in itself and that by eating of that one tree they could be "like God" and thus rid of him. They put their faith in food, believing that their existence depended on bread alone.

Christ, the new Adam, at the start of his ministry fasted 40 days and 40 nights. He became

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hungry. Such hunger helps us realize we depend on something else—when we face the ultimate question: on what does my life depend? Satan tempted Adam and Eve and Christ, saying: Eat, for your hunger is proof that you depend entirely on food, that your life is in food. Adam and Eve believed and ate. Christ, meanwhile, said, "Man does not live by bread alone." This liberates us from total dependence on food, on matter, on the world. Thus, for Christians, fasting is the only means by which a person recovers his true spiritual nature. People sometimes fast as a fad, of course, but there must be a spiritual component to fasting, otherwise it remains essentially about food—the lack of it. The second half of Christ's statement revealed what humanity does live

by: "every word that comes forth from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4).

Fasting in Lent recalls our dependence on God alone: his Word and his Word made flesh. The truest of all foods is the Eucharist. Before this food, we break our fast every time, because this is not food for this world, but the Bread of Heaven. Fasting empties us, making us ready to receive the food of grace.

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