Tuesday of 1st Week of Lent

FILL

"If you have promised Christ to go by the strait and narrow way, restrain your stomach, because by pleasing and enlarging it, you break your contract. Attend and you will hear Him who says: "Spacious and broad is the way of the belly that leads to the perdition of fornication, and many there are who go in by it; because narrow is the gate and strait is the way of fasting that leads to the life of purity, and few there be that find it." St. John Climacus

ST JOHN CLIMACUS

Abbot of Sinai, so called "Climacus" from the title of his famous book, The Climax, or The Ladder of Perfection; also known as John Scholasticus. He was a Syrian or a Palestinian who started his eremitical life at sixteen, living for many years as a hermit on Sinai. He then went to Thale. Revered also as a scriptural scholar, he authored The Ladder of Perfection to provide a comprehensive treatise on the ideal of Christian perfection and the virtues and vices of the monastic life. Composed in thirty chapters, it was intended to correspond to the age of Christ at the time of his baptism by John the Baptist. John was elected abbot of the monks of Mt. Sinai at the age of seventy He died there on March 30.

Eating itself is natural to a human being, and there is nothing wrong with enjoying the food one eats; it is gluttony, rather, which is a passion and a vice. As St. John Climacus describes it, gluttony is a false opinion about the way things are: "Gluttony is hypocrisy of the stomach. filled, it moans about scarcity; stuffed and crammed, it wails about its hunger. Gluttony thinks up seasoning, creates sweet recipes….Gluttony has a deceptive appearance: it eats moderately but wants to gobble everything at the same time." Gluttony has its own cognitive element, and one which is based in deception. Through the practice of fasting, controlling the stomach, one does not simply reduce one's dietary intake to the minimum possible, but instead learns to break through the hypocrisy of the stomach, to know that one will not die if one does not eat as one has become accustomed to do. The "hypocrisy" of the stomach is not located in the bodily organ itself, but in the mind's relation to the stomach.

St. John Climacus was someone who struggled a lot with going to food and drink when he felt empty and needed to be filled. He came to realize that the problem was not food or drink but his attitude towards them. The more he realized his desire of being filled with God, the less of a desire he had to be filled with food. St. John used fasting to retrain his brain to allow God to refill him rather than food. How do you seek to use fasting to retrain yourself to allow God to fill you?

For your prayer

St. John would have prayed with Matthew 6:7-15. Use your imagination as you slowly read Matthew 6:7-15. Please reflect on how fasting can help you to allow God to satisfy your desire to be filled.