



Homily for 3/3/2019

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time, Year C  
(Last Sunday before Lent)

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

*Don't Be a Pagan!*

Don't be a Pagan! You were made to bear fruit!

We are like fruit trees. Therefore we are made for bearing fruit. But we are not wild fruit trees; we are like an orchard, cultivated and planted purposely by the Lord to bear the fruit of Godliness. Fruit planted in an orchard is meant to be harvested.

There is also the reality that we were made for good fruit, not bad fruit. The reality is that we have not always cultivated our vines for the purpose of making our fruit the best possible fruit for God. We have become brambles and thorn bushes instead of producers of good fruit.

“How can a tree produce fruit unless it is cultivated and cared for?” We know very well how to cultivate and care for our bodies - even if we don't do it! But how does one cultivate and care for the soul? Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the three classic ways of cultivating the life of faith in the soul.

- Prayer is an intimate conversation with the Lord in the interior of the heart. And it requires the sacrifice of time.
- Fasting is a mortification of the body that puts it rightly in subordination to the soul and it requires the sacrifice of comfort.
- Almsgiving is the mortification of the material means that we have and it requires the sacrifice of our material goods.

And yet these things seem to go by the wayside very quickly in our lives. People seem to discount them easily. Even Christians have fallen out of these practices. Well-meaning Christian people have fallen out of the practice of mental prayer and quiet time with the Lord in exchange for active service, saying, “my work is my prayer.” There is perhaps good intention here, but they run the risk of losing their souls by loving the works of the Lord instead of the Lord of the works; forgetting that there must be a balance between the two, as our relationship with the Lord is the soul of any apostolate.

Even more so, the practice of fasting and abstinence has been reduced to a minor head nod toward the practice that had been the mainstay of every saint ever produced in the history of the Church! We've reduced our fast days to merely Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. We got rid of the Ember Days (quarterly fasting) and made the fast before Holy Communion so short, that if Father preaches a little long, you can come to Church with a Snicker's bar in your hand!

Now, this was done seemingly to combat the heresy of Jansenism, which was truly a pernicious error that led many astray 200 years ago. (If I could sum up the error of Jansenism in one phrase, “If you are enjoying it, it must be sinful.”) It is the error that there is no legitimate pleasure. But I must confess I have never met a Jansenist these days. What I have met are modern day pagans. By ‘pagan’ I would mean anyone who thinks there is no illegitimate pleasure. “If it feels good, it can't be wrong.” There are modern pagans even among those who claims the title of Catholic Christian today. Because of their attachment to worldly things they, like the pagans, serve man made idols of power, pleasure and wealth instead of the True and Living God, Jesus Christ.



The pagan knows **only** how to eat, drink, and be merry. The Jansenist knows **only** how to pray fast and give alms. But the true Catholic Christian knows how to **both** rejoice and how to be sorrowful. The true Catholic Christian knows how to feast **as well as** how to fast. The true Catholic Christian knows how to eat, drink, and be merry **and** how to pray, fast, and give alms.

If you are feasting without periodically fasting, you are a pagan. And if you are fasting without periodically feasting, you are a Jansenistic pelagian.

Don't be either! Be a true Catholic Christian. It's better all around!

Lent is coming up this Wednesday. Now, prayer, fasting and almsgiving should not be misunderstood as exclusively a thing to do during Lent. (Here is where the pagan way of thinking has crept in). Leaving the fasting only to Lent would be like saying we should only exercise for 40 days out of 365! How absurd. However, Lent is the traditional time of the year to enact these three things in a more intense way by declaring specific goals for prayer, fasting and almsgiving that one would stick to for these next forty days preparing us for Easter.

I have a few suggestions:

For prayer, consider making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament outside of Sunday during the week. Many parishes have access to the Blessed Sacrament in some fashion or another. We here at the Basilica are keeping our doors open from 6am till 4pm every day and on Tuesdays and Wednesdays we have a man who has dedicated himself to sitting in the church till 7pm to keep it open. Make use of that! Come into the Lord's sanctuary. Spend some time in his presence. You don't need an iPhone for FaceTime with the Lord!

For fasting, consider not only fasting from food but rather, the real enemy of the soul in our day: entertainment and social media. Consider taking a Facebook or Netflix fast; or Instagram, or Twitter or YouTube - pick your poison! The key to good fasting is not just to give up something, but to put something better in its place. Just as you take the money you would have spent on food and give it to the poor or take the time you spent eating and spend it in prayer instead, so too when you give up secular entertainment, consider replacing it with something edifying like a good spiritual book or listening to a catechetical series from the many multimedia platforms out there. Just to note, we are preparing to roll out the "Formed" program for our parish that will give everyone access to a whole host of awesome and powerful Catholic media content that can feed your soul much better than the latest sit-com or blockbuster movie.

For almsgiving, there is of course the reality of money that has to be accounted for. Make sure you are being a good steward of your financial means. The traditional measure is the tithe, that is, 10% of your income to Church or charity. Take stock of how you measure up to that and make a plan to work towards it even if you can't get there in one move. But beyond the bank account, there is the reality that we are very rich in possessions. How many documentaries and TV shows are there these days that address hoarders or help people to get rid of stuff because they don't know how to! Our material possessions are the bramble and thorn that chokes out the seed of the Word in our hearts. Marie Kondo doesn't need to be the only person telling you to detach from material things. The Gospel of Jesus Christ already beat her to the punch. Take stock of your possessions and consider your 'Spring Cleaning' a chance to declutter, downsize, or reduce your collection of unneeded material things in your home, office, or even car. These things can be your almsgiving if you can find a good home for them or even by donating them to the "Greater Good" Ladies of Charity thrift store on Rossville Blvd.

You were made to bear fruit for the Kingdom. Now is the time to cultivate and care for the vine of the heart, that it might bear fruit. And do not be afraid to let it be plucked for others' sake.



When the fruit is harvested it has to be separated from the tree, snapped from the branch, and the tree is left without the fruit it had. Fruit trees are meant to give life, not just retain it. Have you ever been around a fruit tree that no one ever picked? The fruit falls to the ground unused and rots, causing quite a stink. When someone calls upon you for the fruit of patience, don't begrudge them. It is why you cultivated the branch. When someone calls upon you for the fruit of charity, don't be stingy. It is why you watered the roots. When you give of yourself, remember it is what you were made for.

As the book of Sirach says, "The fruit of the tree shows the care it has had." And Jesus says, "every tree is known by its fruit"

May Jesus Christ be Praised!