

CONCLUSION

When we are young children, our parents tell us to do what is good for us. They give us rules to follow, and we follow them, but not because we realize what is good for us, but because those rules are imposed on us. When we grow older, we begin to understand what is good for us, and follow in that way freely. It is the same with the rules of the Church. When we are babies in the faith, we follow rules and canons often without a good idea why. But when we advance in spiritual age, we begin to understand that these are not some meaningless arbitrary rules, but a path to spiritual health and communion with God. With age come freedom and responsibility, and we find ourselves having to decide how rules apply in our lives and whether we are able to break them. But just as it is the mark of a child to obey rules without understanding what they do, it is also childish and immature to want to break rules just because one can. Imagine that our parents tell us not to stick metal objects into an electric outlet; they may even slap our hand if we try. At a certain age, we will find that there is no one to stop us—we are old enough to do what we wish. And then we will discover that it is still a good rule not to stick metal objects into an electric outlet. Maybe our parents made us brush our teeth. When we are in college, our parents are not there to tell us to brush our teeth, but if we have any sense in us, we will do that on our own without being told to. And if we choose not to brush our teeth, we will not only offend others by the foul smell from our mouth, but will also allow our own teeth to rot. Our loving mother Church gives us rules to follow. If we do not follow these rules, the result will be foul smell and decay in our soul. And thus, the task should not be to find as many excuses as possible for breaking the fast. Whether we are young or getting older, whether we work or study, whether we exercise or travel—Christians at all times in the history of the Church were both young and old, worked and studied, exercised and travelled, and kept the fast. The task should be to keep our faith, to discipline our body, and to grow in the Spirit in every situation and under all circumstances. Fasting is only one aspect of our spiritual practice, but it is an important one. It is one of the two wings which help us rise to heaven. A bird with only one wing cannot fly; and a Christian who cannot control his belly does not have spiritual freedom. Undoubtedly, you have heard these theoretical musings before. But I hoped to show that as a practical matter, fasting is very much possible in most, if not all situations. We must lead by example and decide that we will stop looking for reasons to break the fast and instead start looking for ways to keep it; learn a new recipe or two, and resolve to exercise our will-power and self-discipline. We reap what we sow. Sow the good seeds of asceticism in your life, and you will reap freedom from slavery to your belly, freedom from the passions of the flesh, and a blessing of following in the footsteps of the greatest saints and our Lord Himself.