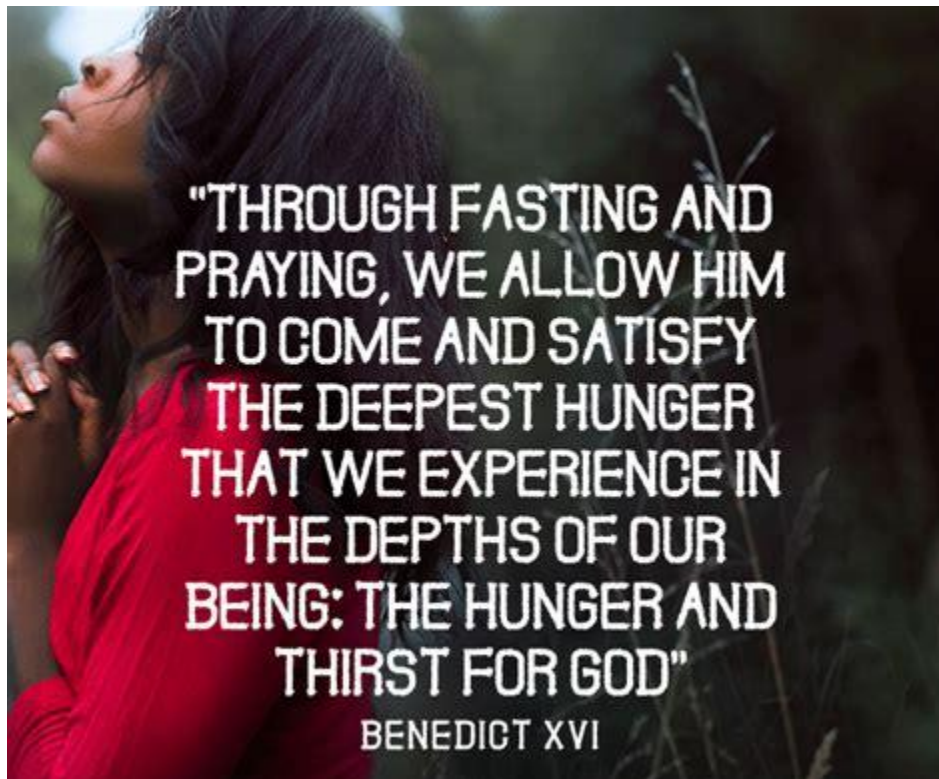


FROM FATHER JOHN: *"Show me your hands. Do they have scars from giving? Show me your feet. Are they wounded in service? Show me your heart. Have you left a place for divine love?"* (Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen)



I have always loved McDonald's. When I was the Pastor of St. Paul of the Apostle parish in Joliet, I lived two doors from the McDonald's at the corner of Jefferson Ave. and Woodland Ave. This was not a good thing for me or for my diet. One year, I decided to give up McDonald's for Lent.

St. Paul's had a Fish Fry during Lent. It was not as good as our Fish Fry, but I would go to it on most Fridays. One Friday, I was at the Fish Fry and sat down to eat with three moms, a dad and a set of grandparents. Their children were all working the fish fry as servers or in the school gym having some fun. One of the moms asked me some questions about the Lenten Regulations which led to a discussion of when Lent ends. I let them know that Lent ends on Holy Thursday at the time of evening prayer which is 4:00 pm in the United States. The mom said, "Don't tell my kids, I want them to wait until Easter Sunday."

Now, it happens that one of her daughters gave up McDonald's (just like I did) for Lent. I told the mom I would treat her daughter to McDonald's after mass on Holy Thursday as long as she came to mass. A few minutes later, the daughter comes up to say hi to her parents. Naturally, to her mom's great dismay, I told her daughter that Lent ends on Holy Thursday at the time of evening prayer. She turns to her mom and says, "We are so-ooo going to McDonald's on Holy Thursday." I loved it but then her mom replied, "Fr. John offered to treat you to McDonald's on Holy Thursday if you go to mass." At least I knew where I'd be on Holy Thursday after mass! (And yes, the daughter went to mass on Holy Thursday, and I treated her to McDonald's).

Why do I tell you this story? It's because as we journey through Lent and give alms, make sacrifices, spend more time in prayer and reading scripture, we can find Lent to be hard. I missed McDonald's as much as the young lady did. I looked forward to Easter and the end of Lent as much as she did. We need to remember to look to Easter, to the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus, to find the strength to continue our Lenten journey; to continue to give alms, to make sacrifices, to spend more time in prayer and reading scripture.

Even though Jesus tells his followers of his resurrection and ascension before they happen, an interesting fact is that we do not have one single witness to the risen Christ that is a non-Christian source. What this tells us is that everyone who encountered the risen Lord was overwhelmed to such a degree that their whole life was changed; that they immediately sought out baptism and new life in Jesus Christ.

But, we do have seven historical facts surrounding the resurrection of our Lord that have been confirmed by historical analysis. First, Jesus of Nazareth was executed and crucified under Pontius Pilate. Second, his disciples begin to proclaim his bodily resurrection and that Jesus lives in God and within and among his people soon after his death. Third, the disciples made this claim based on eyewitness testimony. Fourth, the tomb of Jesus Christ must have been found empty. Otherwise, the production of the body of the dead Jesus could have been used to disprove the resurrection by those opposed to Christ. Fifth, the disciple's belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ radically transformed their lives. Sixth, many of the eyewitnesses and the disciples suffered martyrdom rather than recount their faith. Seventh, and finally, millions of people converted to Christianity based on the proclamation of the resurrection and the preaching of Christ's disciples.

The disciples met in fear and anxiety after the Lord's ascension, yet they took on the mission to spread the Word of the Lord throughout the world. And they proclaimed it boldly and with confidence. Something happened to them that radically changed their lives, their response to the Lord and how they took on the mission of continuing the work of Jesus Christ.

What changed was that they were given two gifts. The first is the presence of the Risen Lord. The second was the gift of the Holy Spirit. These gifts were operative in their lives, and the same gifts have been offered to the entire Church community down through the centuries. These same gifts have been given to us and are operative in our lives.

This gospel gives us the same joy that it gave the first Christians. It makes us realize that the risen Lord gives us the ability to rejoice, to hope and to have faith. It reminds us that we have been sent by Christ on His mission to bring God and His forgiveness to the world. The disciples rejoiced when they met the Risen Lord. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus gave the Apostles and the disciples hope in the face of their fears just as it offers us hope today. It gave them confidence in the future.

Lent and Easter remind each of us to recognize the Risen Lord in our own lives, to rejoice in the Risen Lord and His presence among us, just as the disciples did over two-thousand years ago.

May God bless you and all those who love the Lord.