

The Big Lenten Prayer Tent

This week's prayer offering was from the Rev. Jackie Bernacchi from White Earth.

The Rev. Jackie Bernacchi, White Earth

Feasting in Fasting

What it is and what it is not:

Corporate and personal fasting has been an honored part of Jewish and Christian Scripture and practice for centuries, but has fallen out of favor for a number of reasons: it is guilty by association with Eastern religions, dangerous mortification practices, extreme diets, and a heightened awareness of eating disorders. Well, this little piece has none of that. The fasting to which I am referring is one or two days at most, is never done to harm the body, and bends to the physical and medical needs of the person fasting. Modify away. I drink plenty of water and an electrolyte replacer during my day or two days of fast. I eat a light meal after sundown. That works for me. But, why do I fast?

Why?

When I want to get to know someone better or celebrate, or maybe we just need to talk, I often share a meal with them. Sitting over a meal helps to sweep aside distractions and lets me concentrate on my friend and our relationship. After dining, I usually feel fed in a different way and, invariably, our friendship is stronger. So, when I get so tied up in the mechanics of my call, in the problems and distractions of life, such that I rush through conversations with my friend God, and avoid unpleasant subjects because . . . well, I can make excuses in a moment's notice, but truth is, I get so I am not talking to my friend God on any sort of real level. Missing that nourishment makes my spirit detrained, weak, avoiding honest contact, creates more distance between us.

The Feast:

When I find my relationship with God strained, I take a day or two to get nourished, filled again; to talk, really talk, to God. It is where the feast meets the fast. The pattern for one day or two days is similar. One can flow into the other. It is up to me how long I want to remain in each of three meals with God. Every meal time is prefaced with prayer, and I usually read several psalms, and then take some time to talk to God out loud. No set time limit. The first friend-to-

friend conversation is easy, a lighter course, about the people on my heart, those situations that I mechanically mention every day. No more lists, just talk. Being honest in petitions is important to our relationship. I go back to a normal day, but often take several breaks to talk about what's going on. I listen for the lessons I don't want to learn. Time passes, then comes the second meal of conversation. I often call this one the "whine with my dinner" talk. This is the main course. I take the time to dump before God all the stuff that has been piling up in me. I can be angry, cry, be unfair, and know my Lord will hear me and bless the rough honesty, the unfair accusations, and the anger. After this harder to digest course, I take a rest time. When I am ready, I come to my friend again. This meal is different. I sit and lean back in a high soft back chair, with my eyes closed, and visualize leaning into my Lord, feeling him surround me with his warmth and understanding. This last course is always the sweetest, to just "be still and know he is God," know I am loved, often ask forgiveness, and express real gratitude. Sometimes, it takes two days to get to the third course. Sometimes, I need to have two main courses. I simply take the time I need for every morsel to strengthen who we are to each other. God and me.

Read *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster. It is an old book, but one to which I return, time and again.