

**Fasting** Friday after Ash Wednesday March 8, 2019 Is 58:1-9a; **Mt 9:14-15** (St. John of God, religious) (The reason for self-denial is to help us control our desires, become master of our own house, and utilize our resources for the good of others.)

**“Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?”**

There is this irony in the gospels that although **Jesus** himself fasted for a long time in the desert when he was tempted by Satan, **he didn't find fasting a particularly meaningful practice, and this is against most traditions.** Now I am not an expert in Islam, but my impression is many Muslims believe the most important thing they do is fast during Ramadan. Of course they only fast during the daylight hours, but nonetheless that's quite something to eat nothing during daylight time for an entire month. In the Eastern traditions there's a great deal of fasting and self-abnegation and withdrawal from the world and pleasure and nutrition and everything else. In Judaism fasting was very important. John the Baptist and the Pharisees practiced it as it says here, “much.”

Jesus was indifferent, and yet to this day **our Church still promotes various forms of fasting**, not by great obligation, true, but it still promotes it. So this is something we have to deal with. First of all we have to try to understand why Jesus didn't in particular think much of it, and I believe the key is that **fasting in itself doesn't do much.** It's only good if it's done number one, in secret as chapter 6 said in Matthew: “When you fast wash your face; don't look glum and gloomy like the hypocrites,” like the actors, like those who want everyone to know they are fasting, “and then your Father who sees what is in secret will reward you.” So **if fasting is something that is done secretly for some spiritual reason in conjunction with prayer and almsgiving**, if we deny ourselves in order to help someone else in other words, then I think it fits into Jesus' basic attitudes toward life. But in itself and for itself no. Self-denial for the sake of self-denial doesn't get us anywhere. **The reason for self-denial is to help us control our desires, become master of our own house, and utilize our resources for the good of others.** Beyond that don't expect any particular benefits from fasting.