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Lenten Fasting or Feasting?

By: [Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D](#)



Is Lent about fasting or feasting? Maybe the two are related, says this commentary on the story of the barren fig tree from Luke 13. Prayer. Fasting. Almsgiving. Three inter-related fertilizers to help the barren fig tree bear fruit.



Some think Lent is a time for fasting. I see it as a time of feasting.

I come to this conclusion based on **the story of the fig tree** in Luke 13. Three years without bearing fruit. What could be the problem? The owner figures that it is simply a dud and wants to cut it down. The vinedresser, a little more in touch with nature, comes to a different conclusion. Maybe all that is needed to turn things around is **a bit of fertilizer**.

As we look at Christians in America, we have to be honest. A full 82% of us say we are Christians. **So where's the fruit?** We're certainly feeding ourselves often enough, with about 67% per cent of us overweight. Obviously what we're consuming is not quite the right nourishment to produce the desired results.

So Lent is a time to examine our diet and make some changes. First, let's **cut the junk food** from the diet so we are not so bloated. It could be the chips, fries, burgers, and cokes that drain our pocketbooks and make us lethargic. Or it could be too many hours of radio, TV, and the web which fill our heads with so much noise that we can't sit still, quiet down and listen to God. **Let's turn it all off for a while.**

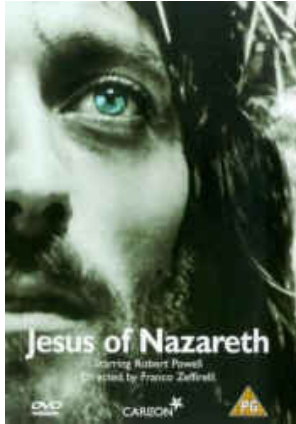


Yes, this is fasting. But the goal is to save our appetite so that we can feast on other things such as **the Word of God**. When's the last time you sat down and read an entire book of the bible, from start to finish? (If not all in one sitting, over the course of a few days). **Exodus** makes for a good Lenten read, since I Cor 10 tells us that Israel's odyssey was for our sake, to provide an example. When was the last time you identified

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a short, poignant Bible text and memorized it, repeating it daily, even several times a day, meditating on it, applying it to various aspects of your life?

How about **the Eucharist**, the greatest nourishment of all? Lent is a great time to go more often, even daily. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass is like stimulating the appetite before the meal (aperitif) or taking time to digest it afterwards (digestif). Either way, adoration helps us derive more benefit from our Eucharistic feast.



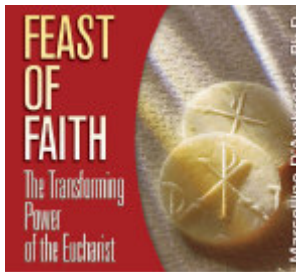
Then there is the time we devote to **entertainment**. Could we not redirect some of those hours to entertainment that nourishes our spiritual life? Mel Gibson's film on the Lord's passion was released on Ash Wednesday, 2004 for a reason. It is offered as a Lenten meditation to help us understand the shocking consequences of sin and the astounding Love that lays down his life for his friends. Get some folks together and watch this powerful film on DVD. If you fear the violence of *The Passion of the Christ* would be too much for you, rent Franco Zeffirelli's "Jesus of Nazareth" and watch it with family and friends. If you prefer books, read the life of a saint or the provocative religious fiction of an author such as C.S. Lewis.

Finally, one of the most spiritually nourishing and energizing experiences of all is giving of ourselves. We call it **almsgiving**. It is in giving that we receive, says the Prayer of St. Francis. If we save money from fasting, let's give it away. There are the corporal works of mercy such as feeding the hungry. Then there are the spiritual works of mercy, such as feeding the spiritually hungry, the millions of inactive and nominal Christians and unchurched people that starve to death for lack of the Word of God. Soup kitchens and evangelization ministries both need our support.



Prayer. Fasting. Almsgiving. Three inter-related fertilizers to help the barren fig tree bear fruit. But keep in mind the owner's directive— fertilize it for a year, and if we see no results, fetch the axe. So no more excuses. No more procrastinating. **Let's vow to make this Lent count.** There may not be another.

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