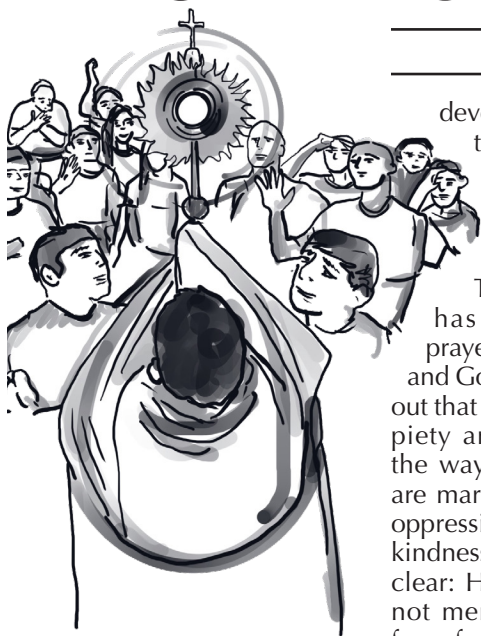


The Meaning of TRUE DEVOTION

John Carlo Perez



Today, the Church presents us with powerful readings that challenge our understanding of fasting, repentance, and true devotion. Our Scripture Readings today guide us on how to engage in Lent with authenticity and purpose. As I reflect on these texts, I am reminded of a story that once moved me deeply: a friend of mine, during a retreat, shared that she had fasted every Lent as well as do other devotional activities but never truly felt any transformation. She went through the motions but found herself unchanged, wondering if her efforts were in vain. It made me realize how easy it is to fall into the trap of externalism in our religious practices, a theme the Scriptures invite us to examine today.

Prophet Isaiah, in our First Reading, gave a wake-up call to those who, like my friend, may focus solely on outward acts of

devotion without engaging the heart. In this passage, God speaks through the prophet to the people of Israel, denouncing their hollow fasting. They wonder why God has not answered their prayers, despite their rituals, and God responds by pointing out that their acts of fasting and piety are disconnected from the way they live. Their fasts are marked by selfishness and oppression, rather than justice, kindness, and humility. God is clear: He desires a fast that is not merely about abstaining from food but about releasing the bonds of injustice, feeding the hungry, and lifting up the oppressed. He wants a heart that is truly converted, one that seeks to do His will and align with His justice.

This message strikes a chord because, often, we too can fall into the pattern of performing religious acts—going to Mass, saying prayers, or observing Lenten practices—without truly allowing those actions to change us. Isaiah reminds us that our devotion must reflect the compassion and righteousness of God. It cannot be a hollow performance or a means to earn God's favor; it must spring from a sincere heart.

This theme of true repentance is echoed in our Responsorial Psalm, where we pray, "A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn." This verse underscores that God is not interested in sacrifices or rituals that come

from pride or arrogance. What He seeks is a broken and humble heart—one that acknowledges its need for His mercy and is open to transformation. This aligns perfectly with Isaiah's message. God does not want ritualistic piety; He desires hearts that are soft and responsive to His call.

In our Gospel today according to Matthew, Jesus provides further clarity. When questioned about why His disciples do not fast, He explains that while He, the bridegroom, is with them, there is no need for fasting. The time for fasting will come when He is no longer with them. Jesus points out that fasting, like all religious practices, is meant to foster a deeper relationship with Him, not merely as an obligation. The question He poses through this teaching is one that all of us must ask ourselves during Lent: Are we fasting to show God how disciplined we are, or are we fasting to grow closer to Him?

All these Scripture passages today call us to examine our motivations, our hearts, and the way we live out our faith. As we continue our journey through Lent, we are invited to let go of any superficial religiosity and embrace a faith that is marked by authenticity and compassion. True fasting, true repentance, is not about outward appearances but about an inward transformation that seeks justice, mercy, and a deeper relationship with God. The challenge is clear: we must ask ourselves, "Am I truly living the Gospel, or am I just performing the actions of faith?" This Lent, may we embrace a humble heart, one that is not spurned by God, but is open to His transforming love.

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Antiphon

(Ps 30[29]: 11)

(Recited when there is no opening song.)

The Lord heard and had mercy on me; the Lord became my helper.

Greeting

(The sign of the cross is made here.)

P—The Lord be with you.

All—And with your spirit.

Introduction

(These [or similar words] may be used to address the assembly.)

P—Today is the first Friday of Lent. Our readings for today remind us that it is a good and holy practice to humble ourselves by abstaining from other than mere food for the body. The eye should abstain from all vain and curious sights, the ears from listening to idle talk, the tongue from detraction and frivolous words. Let us keep in mind that true sorrow for past sins can best be expressed through acts of love and charity toward others.

Penitential Act

P—Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.
(Pause)

P—Have mercy on us, O Lord.

All—For we have sinned against you.

P—Show us, O Lord, your mercy.

All—And grant us your salvation.

P—May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

All—Amen.

P—Lord, have mercy.

All—Lord, have mercy.

P—Christ, have mercy.

All—Christ, have mercy.

P—Lord, have mercy.

All—Lord, have mercy.

Collect

P—Let us pray. *(Pause)*

Show gracious favor, O Lord, we pray, to the works

of penance we have begun, that we may have strength to accomplish with sincerity the bodily observances we undertake.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

All—Amen.

LITURGY OF THE WORD



First Reading (Is 58:1–9a) *(Sit)*

Fasting should unite rich and poor. Only the wealthy can fast; they alone have something of which to deprive themselves. In fasting, they share the lot of the poor who are always hungry. To fast and neglect the poor is a form of conceit.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

THUS says the Lord God: Cry out full-throated and unsparingly, lift up your voice like a trumpet blast; Tell my people their wickedness, and the house of Jacob their sins. They seek me day after day, and desire to know my ways, Like a nation that has done what is just and not abandoned the law of their God; They ask me to declare what is due them, pleased to gain access to God. “Why do we fast, and you do not see it? afflict ourselves, and you take no note of it?”

Lo, on your fast day you carry out your own pursuits, and drive all your laborers. Yes, your fast ends in quarreling and fighting, striking with wicked claw. Would that today you might fast so as to make your voice heard on high!

Is this the manner of fasting I wish, of keeping a day of penance: That a man bow his head like a reed and lie in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the

oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; Your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!

—The word of the Lord.

All—Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 51)

R—A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.

1. Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me. **(R)**

2. For I acknowledge my offense, and my sin is before me always: “Against you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight.” **(R)**

3. For you are not pleased with sacrifices; should I offer a burnt offering, you would not accept it. My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn. **(R)**

Verse before the Gospel

(Cf. Am 5:14) (Stand)

All—Seek good and not evil so that you may live, and the Lord will be with you.

Gospel (Mt 9:14–15)

P—A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew
All—Glory to you, O Lord.

THE DISCIPLES of John approached Jesus and said, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken

away from them, and then they will fast."

—The Gospel of the Lord.

All—Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily *(Sit)*

Prayer of the Faithful

P—Father, your Son Jesus, is the eternal Bridegroom who ushers us to the joy of the heavenly banquet. In his passion, he would be taken away from his disciples. May our Lenten discipline mark our solidarity with the Lord.

R—Father, hear our prayer.

C—May nothing destroy the supernatural joy of Easter in us even if we are undergoing moments of trials and darkness. We pray: **(R)**

C—May fraternal love increase our capacity for joy. May we not focus primarily on our needs which invites a joyless existence. We pray: **(R)**

C—May we fight against concupiscence, the temptation of the flesh, and the snare of the devil through prayer, meditation on the Word of God, and through the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance. We pray: **(R)**

C—May we not fear going to the fringes of society to find Jesus who is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, and in their sorrows. We pray: **(R)**

C—May we not give in to despair when separation and death take our beloved ones away from us, but draw assurance from Jesus who promised that our sorrow would turn into joy. We pray: **(R)**

C—Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions *(pause)*. We pray: **(R)**

P—Almighty Father, may we keep the lamps of our faith burning in this life and so merit to enter the banquet of eternal life with the eternal Bridegroom who lives and reigns with you forever and ever.

All—Amen.

**LITURGY OF
THE EUCHARIST**



Presentation of the Gifts

(Stand)

P—Pray, brethren...

All—May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P—We offer, O Lord, the sacrifice of our Lenten observance, praying that it may make our intentions acceptable to you and add to our powers of self-restraint.

Through Christ our Lord.

All—Amen.

Preface III of Lent

P—The Lord be with you.

All—And with your spirit.

P—Lift up your hearts.

All—We lift them up to the Lord.

P—Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All—It is right and just.

P—It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For you will that our self-denial should give you thanks, humble our sinful pride, contribute to the feeding of the poor, and so help us to imitate you in your kindness.

And so we glorify you with countless Angels, as with one voice we acclaim:

All—Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation *(Stand)*

All—We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord's Prayer

All—Our Father...

P—Deliver us, Lord...

All—For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion

(Kneel)

P—Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

All—Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon

(Ps 25[24]: 4)

O Lord, make me know your ways, teach me your paths.

Prayer after Communion

(Stand)

P—Let us pray. *(Pause)*

We pray, almighty God, that, through partaking of this mystery, we may be cleansed of all our misdeeds, and so be suited for the remedies of your compassion.

Through Christ our Lord.

All—Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P—The Lord be with you.

All—And with your spirit.

Prayer over the people

P—Bow down for the blessing. *(Pause)*

For your mighty deeds, O God of mercy, may your people offer endless thanks, and, by observing the age-old disciplines along their pilgrim journey, may they merit to come and behold you for ever.

Through Christ our Lord

All—Amen.

P—And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.

All—Amen.

Dismissal

P—The Mass is ended. Go in peace.

All—Thanks be to God.



PRAYER TO THE SACRED HEART *of Jesus*

Divine Jesus, you have said, "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," behold me kneeling at your feet, filled with a lively faith and confidence in the promises dictated by your Sacred Heart and pronounced by Your adorable lips. I come to ask this favor: *(Here silently mention your petitions).*

To whom can I turn if not to you whose Heart is the source of all graces and merits? Where should I seek if not in the treasure which contains all the riches of your kindness and mercy? Where should I knock if not at the door through which God gives himself to us and through which we go to God? I have recourse to You, Heart of Jesus. In you I find consolation when afflicted,

protection when persecuted, strength when burdened with trials, and light in doubt and darkness.

Dear Jesus, I firmly believe that you can grant me the grace I implore, even though it should require a miracle. You have only to will it, and my prayer will be granted. I admit that I am most unworthy of your favors, but this is not a reason for me to be discouraged. You are the God of Mercy and you will not refuse a contrite heart. Cast upon me a look of mercy, I beg of you, and your kind Heart will find in my miseries and weaknesses a reason for granting my prayers.

O Sacred Heart, whatever may be your decision with regard to my request, I will never stop adoring, loving, praising and serving you. My Lord Jesus, be pleased to accept this my act of perfect resignation to the decrees of your adorable Heart which I sincerely desire may be fulfilled by me and all your creatures forever.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I know that there is but one thing impossible to you: to be without pity to those who are suffering or in distress. Look upon me, I beg of you, dear Jesus, and grant me the grace for which I humbly implore you through the Immaculate Heart of your most sorrowful Mother. You have entrusted me to her as her child, and her prayers are all-powerful with you. Amen.

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