

The Lenten Spring

From The Lenten Covenant
By L. C. Contos



Many see Lent as a time when something that may be intrinsically good nevertheless goes on the forbidden list, as if God took some perverse pleasure in tormenting us!

For the deep thinkers on Lenten commentaries, however, it is exactly the opposite. It is a **return** to normal life, to that fasting, that abstinence, which Adam and Eve violated, thus introducing alienation, and sin and death into the human condition. And so, we are called to welcome Lent as a spiritual springtime.

*The Lenten Spring has come,
the light of repentance...
Let us receive the proclamation of
Lent with Joy!
For if our forefather Adam had kept
the fast,
We would not have been deprived
of Paradise...*

This is the first of two events in the Bible which help us to discern the uniquely Christian content of fasting. It comes, of course, at the very beginning of the OLD COVENANT. The second relates, obviously, to the NEW COVENANT. The first has to do with the 'breaking of the fast' by Adam when he ate of the forbidden fruit. This is the metaphor, the image, by which man's original sin is revealed to us. The image thus becomes a symbol of the new dispensation, as Christ, the second Adam, according to St. Paul, begins by fasting. Adam was tempted and succumbed to temptation. Christ was likewise tempted and overcame it. The consequence of Adam's failure is expulsion from Paradise and death. The fruit of Christ's Pascal-Easter victory is the conquest of death and our return to Paradise. Estrangement and alienation; reconciliation and at-one-ment.

But why is the story of original sin reduced for us to terms of an act of eating? Food is the means of life; it is what keeps us alive. That, of course, is the

biological meaning of life, physical life that depends on food, or more generally, on the physical world. We call it 'mortal life,' because mortality, death, is always at work in it. What Adam received from God's quickening breath was immortality. God created no death, we are told. Why then is death the one absolute certainty? The Church replies: because man rejected life as it was offered under God's covenant, and preferred a life depending not on God alone, but on bread alone.

Satan comes to Adam in Paradise. To Christ, he came in the desert. To both he said, in effect, eat because your hunger is proof that your life is in food and it is good. Adam believed and ate. Christ rejected that temptation and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Thus by citing what is explicit in the Old Covenant, Jesus restores the proper relationship between food and life, the relationship which God intended and which Adam distorted; which we ourselves distort every day, especially during the Lenten fast.

What then is fasting for us as Christians? It is the means by which we participate in that moment when the Lord Himself declares man to be not totally dependent on food, on matter, on 'the world.' We are by no means totally liberated to be sure. We live after all in a fallen world, the world of the first Adam, and as part of that imperfect, physical order of things, still depend on food for nurture and sustenance. Thus, the very act of fasting is our personal renunciation of that imperfect order, a declaration of our independence from life 'by bread alone.' We affirm that we do in fact find true life in 'every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'

Even as we ask God for 'our daily bread,' it is meant as a means of communion with, dependence on, God rather than that which separates us from God. And finally, our essential food, the real sustenance of our life in God, is "the food of immortality," the very Body and Blood of the Risen Jesus Himself. It is highly significant that Satan comes to Jesus while He was fasting. Does he not do the same with us? But, when in our physical hunger we transform it into a source of spiritual power to prevail over it, it is then that we give the lie to the words that beguiled Adam.



Christ Is Risen, Alleluia!!!
...are you proof of this?