

WHAT DO YOU HUNGER FOR?

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(Borrowed and slightly edited by Father Peter Smith from the weekly OCN Newsletter, and used here with permission.)

A recent study found that “approximately 127 million adults in the U.S. are overweight, 60 million obese, and 9 million severely obese.” (American Obesity Association) This “epidemic” of overweight Americans is a symptom of a deeper poverty.

In the book of Genesis, it was food that got our race into trouble in the first place. The old saying, “you are what you eat,” was meant to reduce a human person to a mechanical engine with skin, but what it really did was reveal something significant about the human soul. We are really an integrated whole being – body, soul and spirit.

It should also come as no surprise to Orthodox Christians that it is also food that communicates to us our very salvation in the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist. As we, the Body of Christ, partake of the Eucharistic banquet, we receive and participate in the Body and Blood of Christ, and more and more become “what we eat.”

At the heart of this discussion is the power of desire. The wisdom of the Holy Spirit in preserving for us as a central part of our Christian faith the discipline of fasting is found in this very core issue of our own spiritual needs – What are you truly hungry for? When you answer this question in your own soul, you will discover just how serious you are about your faith, about your very salvation.

Here are three wise principles that the discipline of fasting brings to each of us as we seek to allow the Holy Spirit to form us anew into the image and likeness of Christ.

First, Fasting reveals my TRUE NEED. When I refuse my temporary desires to focus on my spiritual growth, I teach my own soul that God and my growth toward Him is the top priority of my life. It is the wisdom of the Orthodox Faith to call me to a time of reflection on my ultimate need from an eternal perspective. In the busyness of our modern lives we have so many “things” competing for our attention and energy. If we don’t purposefully stop and evaluate our spiritual condition, we will let slip that which is most important in our lives.

Second, Fasting reveals who I TRULY AM. One of the wise purposes of the discipline of fasting is to help me seriously mourn the *misuse* of the good things to which I am saying “no” for a short period of time. I get to fast from certain foods so I can finally learn to receive them with thanksgiving rather than as my “due.” We live in an age where

the spirit of “entitlement” seems to rule the day. Gratitude is a fast fading virtue in our society and the main reason for this is that we have failed to receive even creation and our very food with thanksgiving. When was the last time you said a prayer before and after your meals to first acknowledge that all good gifts come from the Father above? Only pigs run to the trough and feed with no thought for the Source of their food!

Finally, Fasting reveals my TRUE PURPOSE. It is in the spiritual work of preparation for participation in the Eucharist (the very word literally means “Thanksgiving”) that I come to know my eternal purpose and destination. I was made to be the companion of God forever. I was created for communion with my fellow believers and the Holy Trinity. In learning to fast and master my desires (rather than be mastered by them) I am confronted with the ultimate purpose for my life. And I am called, by God’s grace, to make my calling in Christ a reality.

My ultimate purpose is not to accumulate as many creature comforts as possible. It isn’t to achieve some notoriety or fame for this or that accomplishment. It isn’t to collect educational degrees so that I learn all I can about this or that subject. No, my ultimate purpose is to enter into the new life Christ wins for me in His death, burial, and resurrection.

It is the spiritual discipline of true fasting that calls me to a purposeful Orthodox Christian lifestyle and choice. It is in confronting the taming of my desires and harnessing their energy for my good that I come to see myself and even God Himself as we were truly meant to be.

May God grant you all a blessed fast!