

8—Fasting: Keeping Us Focused on Our Journey

Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will be able to ...

- understand that fasting keeps us focused on being with the Lord.
- realize that fasting requires discipline and sacrifice.
- recognize the ways the Church asks us to fast and the ways we can fast in private.

For the Catechists

Fasting keeps us focused on the Lord. That is the reason we fast—not just to meet the requirements that our Church gives us. Regretfully, the requirement of fasting often has been the only motivation for fasting. As a result, Christians were happy to see many of those requirements abrogated by the Church. But Christians need to understand that fasting is still necessary for us to grow closer to God. We need to decide what activities are keeping us away from God and replace them with choices that help us grow closer to God. This lesson helps the students recognize and make those good choices.

Scripture tells us that our journey is not just a casual trip to God but a constant battle against evil. St. Paul says, "Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil" (Ephesians 6:10-11). The Church Fathers remind us that this warfare is the hardest of all because it is fought in our hearts that are surrounded by signs of our broken human condition and the allure of these activities. This warfare is the reason we need fasting. We need to condition ourselves to think about our journey to God. We need to grow strong enough to endure our daily activities without giving in to our human inclinations. We need to keep walking with the Lord no matter what is surrounding us.

This lesson teaches the youth that fasting is one way we learn to focus on Jesus. The emphasis is on using the fast to say "no" to what everyone else is doing and "yes" to what Jesus asks us to do. Encourage the students to think about fasting as more than giving up. Fasting is turning away from things and activities and letting Jesus fill in the hunger and time slot.

But the students need to work on sacrificing because our daily life includes instant gratification. Technology allows us to know just about everything in the shortest amount of time. The youth of today are constantly bombarded by sounds, sights, and experiences, and now we are asking them to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus. Help these young people realize they need this training in fasting because this journey to God is not easy.

Materials Needed

Opening Prayer: "The Lord's Prayer"

Icon: Christ Pantocrator (*Come Bless the Lord* icon packet #3).

Closing Prayer: Scripture on the last page of the lesson.

Pens, pencils, markers and white paper

1. Opening Prayer

- Chant or recite "The Lord's Prayer."

2. Introduction

Allow a few minutes to share ideas about all the activities they do throughout the day. Ask them if there are any activities for which they must practice. Lead the discussion to include how everything worthwhile needs practice, patience, and endurance.

3. Guided Reading

- Before the reading, review last week's objectives. Then summarize this week's objectives of the lesson on a wall pad or easel pad to use for review next week.
- Have students read text aloud and emphasize the importance of fasting in their lives.
- All scriptural passages and prayer should be read aloud together.
- Ask the students to answer the questions at the end of these pages.

4. Scriptural Reflection

- Help students find Matthew 6:16-18.
- Before reading aloud, have students make the sign of the cross. Remind them that reading Scripture is praying.
- Look at the icon and ask the students to see themselves praying with the Publican.
- Give the students 3 minutes to answer the questions and read the passage again.
- Ask the students to work in groups of 2 and share their answers aloud.
- Possible answers:
 - He trusts that you will fast.
 - Don't brag—"pray to your Father in secret."
 - Answers will vary.
- Make a list of complaints they have and decide on ways to stop complaining.

Background Reading (Fasting, Praying, and Almsgiving)

"Fasting is counterproductive to spiritual growth unless it is coupled with prayer and almsgiving. Simply not doing something can create a vacuum, and so the time and energy usually devoted to eating or entertainment needs to be redirected. Just not eating will probably not draw us closer to the Lord.

"Increasing your religious activity can mean attending divine services more frequently, reading, using religious video or audio [recordings] or devoting time to charitable concerns, such as working in a shelter for the homeless. Many people keep a container on their dining table and place in it the cost of the foods they are giving up, to be used for charitable purposes. By maintaining the link between prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we increase the possibility that we will be sincerely fasting in the spirit as well as in the body" (DC 33-34).

5. From the Teaching of the Church Fathers

- Ask one student to read the words from St. John Chrysostom.
- Have the students answer the questions; then discuss their answers. Suggestions: This list will vary. Encourage the students to be specific.

6. Liturgical Study

- Read the paragraphs aloud.
- Ask: "Why do you think we should fast? How can we help each other fast?"
- Ask: "Do you recognize this icon from the cover of the Grade 7 book?" (Icon of Transfiguration and the book's title is *We Become God-Like*.) Encourage a discussion about how fasting helps us become God-Like and how this relates to the icon—we become transfigured like Christ!

7. Closing Prayers

Scripture on the last page of the lesson.

Supplemental Activities:

Review—At the end of the lesson, ask the students what they remember by using one of the following suggestions:

1. Make a list of training techniques for Eastern Christian young people to help them grow strong for their lifetime journey to God.
2. Draw a poster showing you as a frontrunner in the race towards God. Add the scriptural passage "Run so as to win." (1 Cor 9:24)
3. For you "Faith Book," write a text (instagram, tweet) of encouragement to someone who is fasting. Write an entry of encouragement for every day of the week.

Background Reading (Rule Of Prayer)

“Because fasting has its limitation, because fasting cannot save us by itself, because it is only a means to a greater end, and because fasting can be done in a hypocritical way does not mean that we should avoid this most helpful way to deny ourselves and to open ourselves to God and to others. Fasting is only a token, a sign that we seek goodness and justice and are willing to sacrifice what is dear to us to obtain what is greater and more wonderful. It is a powerful token, though, for so many people find it so difficult. It is an act of faith in a world which emphasizes other values” (*Journey* TM 158).