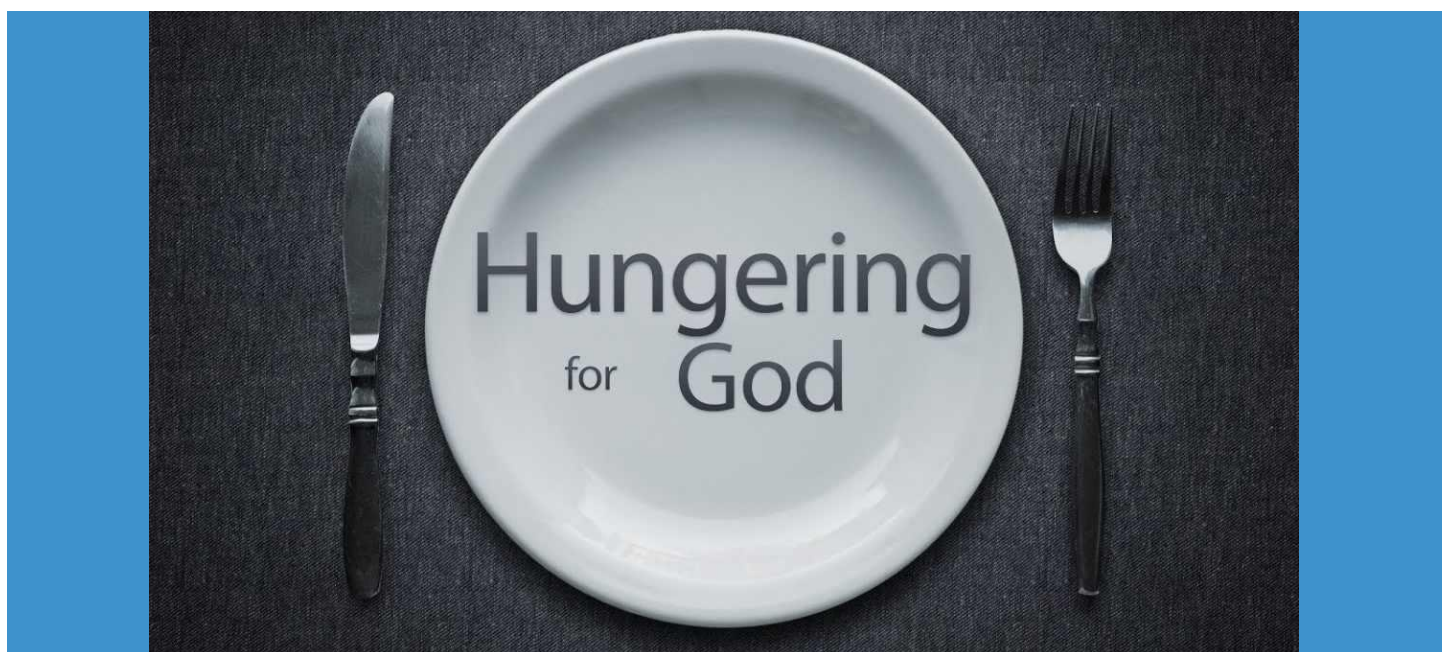


Teens & Fasting

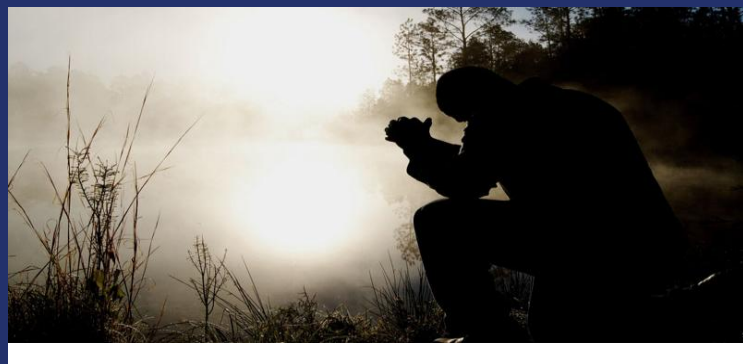
IS IT POSSIBLE?



MY EXPERIENCE

LEARNING TO FAST

As I grew up my only notion of fasting was on the Fridays during Lent and Good Friday with my family. I did it because I was told, but there was no deeper meaning. I would get frustrated, because I didn't like seafood, so my options were minimal. Reflecting back, I see the grace of obligation, because it taught me fidelity to my commitments. However, when I was in high school, I participated in a 30-hour fast with my youth group. That experience changed my understanding of fasting and stirred a calling to make fasting a more regular part of my practice of the faith outside of the Lenten season. Fasting became the space where I could empty my life of the superficial, make room for God, and let my hunger teach me that only in God could I ever find true satiation.



CHANGE THE 'ASK'

- 1) Make it communal!
- 2) Unite fasting and prayer!
- 3) Focus on transformation and conversion!

"Continually we carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that in our bodies the life of Jesus may also be revealed." (2 Corinthians 4:10)

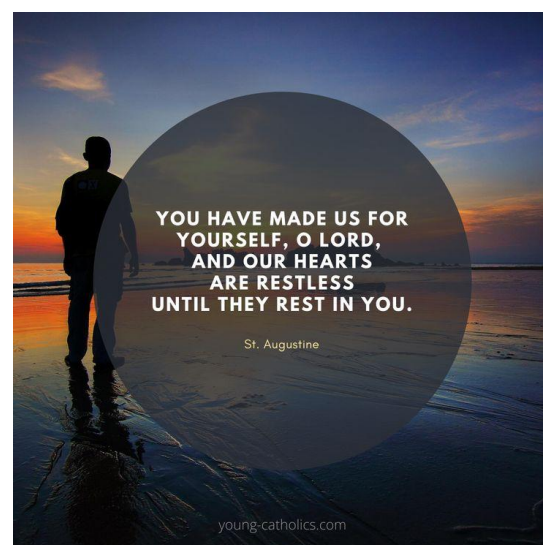
Communal Fasting

While Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:18 that our fasting should not be seen by others, but by our Father who sees in secret, when young people are learning the real sacrifice necessary to make a meaningful fast, **accountability** is needed. Encourage your youth to form a small group or make a commitment as a large group to a communal fast. Consider a 30-hour bread & water fast or one meal day fast or liquid only fast. Pick a day where the youth can gather for most of the day **together**. Being in person makes the accountability easier! When the temptation comes to give up, their friends can keep them faithful. **We are better together than apart!**



FASTING & PRAYER

Encourage each youth to take the time they are fasting from food during a mealtime to fill it with prayer. Skipping a meal becomes more burdensome when we allow them to focus on what they are missing. When mealtime becomes an **intentional** prayer time, each youth begins to find meaning in their fasting. The emptiness they are feeling physically begins to draw them into a deeper relationship with God. Suggest to your youth to **plan out** who or what they will pray for each time they fast. Having a particular intention keeps the prayer fruitful and focused. As they unite fasting and prayer, your youth will begin to experience St. Augustine's beautiful words: "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."



By fasting and meditation upon our Lord's Passion we most readily awake within ourselves the grace of contrition and consciousness of sin. (Taken from "The Catechism Explained" by Fr. Francis Spirago)

TRANSFORMATION & CONVERSION

Fasting unites us to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. We do not fast, because we are holy. We fast because we need to be changed. Remind your youth that fasting is not easy. They will face temptation, discouragement and failure. Encourage them to unite their struggles to the cross knowing they will come to fuller realization of their own sinfulness. Fasting should lead your youth back to the sacrament of Reconciliation. Be ready to listen to their struggles while reminding them to uphold their commitments. I find the words of the hymn Change Our Hearts (Rory Conney) speak the truths we need to hear as we teach our youth the purpose of fasting:

Change our hearts this time; Your word says it can be. Change our minds this time; Your life could make us free. We are the people Your call sets apart. Lord, this time change our hearts. Brought by Your hand to the edge of our dreams; one foot in paradise, one in the waste. Drawn by your promises; still we are lured by the shadows and the chains we leave behind, but change our hearts this time...yes, this time change our hearts.

"Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others, you open God's ear to yourself."

-St. Peter Chrysologus