

Matthew 6:1-18, New King James Version (NKJV)

“..... But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

My beloved Children in the Diocese of Sydney, I would like to congratulate all of you on the fasting of the Holy Lent, I pray to the Almighty God to give all of you the blessings of these Holy Days.

In our journey towards Christ's Resurrection, we will study together a Research on Fasting.

A- Main title of the research:” Fasting”.

B- Verse of the research: [Matthew 4:2](#), And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

C- Main points of the research:

- 1- **Definition of the word:” Fasting”.**
- 2- **Why we must fast?**
- 3- **How can we fast in right way?**
- 4- **Fasting in the Coptic Orthodox Church**
- 5- **What are the virtues that should accompany our fasting?**
- 6- **The types of the wrong fasting.**
- 7- **The effect of the true fasting.**
- 8- **The fasting of the sinners.**
- 9- **Fasting and the Seven Sacraments in the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.**
- 10- **The Fasting of the Gentiles.**
- 11- **The life of fasting.**
- 12- **Some saying of fathers of the Church about fasting.**

and today we will study together some points of the Research.

Definition of the word:” Fasting”:

1-1: The meaning of the word:” Fasting” is :” To abstain from food”¹.

1-2: The meaning of the word:” Fasting” according to the Christian teachings is not only to :” To abstain from food” , but also to abstain from doing evil deeds or committing sins, instead doing charitable deeds to those who are in need.

1- Why we must fast?

We fast for the following reasons:

2-1: *Fasting means returning back to the Lord and worship Him only and abandon all worship of other gods* as we read in ***1 Samuel 7:3-6 ,New King James Version (NKJV),³ Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths^[a] from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.”⁴ So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths,^[b] and served the Lord only.***

⁵ And Samuel said, “Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you.”⁶ So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the Lord.” And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

2-2: Fasting is the way for the Lord having mercy on us when we fall in trouble as we read in:

2-2-1: [2 Samuel 1:12](#),And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

2-2-2: [2 Samuel 12:16](#),David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

2-2-3: [2 Chronicles 20:1-3](#),New King James Version (NKJV) ,²⁰ It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites,^[a] came to battle against Jehoshaphat. ² Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, “A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria,^[b] and they are in Hazazon Tamar” (which is En Gedi). ³ And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

¹ - Franklin Dictionary.

2-2-4: **Esther 4:3**, *And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.*

2-2-5: **Esther 4:16**, *"Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"*

2-3: **Fasting is the right means to seek from the Lord the right way for us** as we read in **Ezra 8:21**, [*Fasting and Prayer for Protection*] *Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. Ezra 8:23, So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.*

2-4: **Fasting is method of those who have great zeal to build the house of the Lord** as we read in *Nehemiah 1:1-4*, **New King James Version (NKJV)**, *1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan^[a] the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."*

⁴ *So it was, when I heard these words that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*

2- **How can we fast in a right way?**

3-1: We need to fast with humility as we read in **Psalms 35:13**, *But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting.*

3-2: While we are fasting we must do good deeds towards ourselves and towards the others as we read in **Isaiah 58:3**, *'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers.*

Isaiah 58:4, *Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high.*

Isaiah 58:5, *Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the Lord?*

Isaiah 58:6, *“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?”*

3-3: We need to fast before God the Almighty only, not before men, as we read in Matthew 6: 16-18: ¹⁶ *“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

3- Fasting in the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria

As a Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, we fast before the Christmas and Easter, we also dedicate fasting for our Fathers the Apostles, for the Mother of God St. Mary and also we fast every Wednesday and every Friday each week, except in the Fifty days after the Easter.

In addition to this, we fast as per the decisions of our Holy Synod .

4- What are the virtues that should accompany our fasting?

Fasting by itself is not enough, we need to train ourselves to gain some virtues which much accompany our fasting such as:

4-1: self-denial **Daniel 9:3**, *Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.*

4-2: prayers as we read in **Joel 1:14**, *Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the Lord your God, And cry out to the Lord.*

4-3: Repentance as we read in **Joel 2:12**, *“Now, therefore,” says the Lord, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”* Repentance must be practiced through the confession of our sins and inequities in front of a canonical priest as we read in **Nehemiah 9:1-3**, *New King James Version (NKJV) ,9 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.^[a] ² Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. ³ And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God.*

4-4: Joy and gladness, practicing truth and peace as we read in [Zechariah 8:19](#), "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'The fast of the fourth month, The fast of the fifth, The fast of the seventh, And the fast of the tenth, Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts For the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.'

5- The types of wrong fasting:

There many types of wrong fasting which had been mentioned in the Bible as follows:

5-1: when Jezebel planned to kill Naboth, as we read the story in *1 Kings 21*, *New King James Version (NKJV)*

"... And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth. ⁹ She wrote in the letters, saying,

Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; ¹⁰ and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die.

¹¹ So the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them. ¹² They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. ¹³ And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died. ¹⁴ Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been

5-2: The people in the days of Zechariah the prophet as we read in [Zechariah 7:5](#), "Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me?'"

5-3: The fasting of the Pharisees who condemned the tax collector as we read the story from the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ as mentioned in *Luke 18:9-14*, *New King James Version (NKJV)*

⁹ Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' ¹³ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as

raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

6- The effect of the true fasting:

6-1: ***cast demons*** as we read in ***Matthew 17:21***, ***however, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.***” We read also the same meaning in ***Mark 9:29***, ***So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”***”

I pray that the LORD may bless all of us so that He may find room within our hearts and may He pour the blessings of this Great Lent on our souls and our homes, through the intercessions of our Lady Virgin St. Mary, and the prayers of our beloved Father of Fathers His Holiness Pop Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria & Patriarch of the See of St Mark, may the Lord bless his life for many years to come to serve God's Kingdom on earth.

Glory be to the Lord, for ever. Amen

Bishop Daniel

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