



## Ask, Father James:

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***“What is the difference between Old Testament Fasting and the New Testament Fast? Is dry fasting still being practiced?”***

This was the clarification that Jesus made when the disciples of John came to Jesus saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” Jesus clarified that; “the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.” (Matthew 9:14-17). In the Old Testament, fasting was usually an expression of sorrow over sin or a plea for God to physically deliver His people from disaster. For example, the people of Nineveh fasted and wore sack clothes and rubbed ashes on themselves pleading for God to relent (Jonah 3:5-9) and also King David fasted pleading for God to relent after the Prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the killing of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 12:14-31). By the time of John the Baptist, fasting has come to be seen as a sign of repentance. John preached repentance and baptized people into repentance asking them to fast in preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Very many Christians today still do the Old Testament fasting or the Old Covenant Dry Fasting wherein they abstain from food and water for long hours or for days, like John the Baptist did, living in the wilderness and not eating real food. Jesus in his response to the disciples of John implies that whether one does dry fasting or simple abstinence fasting, the New Covenant fasting would be a new paradigm of fasting—a fast motivated by desire to hunger for Jesus to come permeate us so that His Grace can fill us up. The New Covenant fasting is to bring us into intimacy with Jesus as the Bridegroom. This is the sense in which the Catechism of the Catholic Church encourages us to fast before Holy Communion so as to hunger and thirst for Jesus Christ. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

Immediately after clarifying this for them, Jesus warned that new wine must be placed into new wine-skins (Matt. 9:16-17). In other words, no mixing of the Old Covenant fasting with the New Covenant way. By this, Jesus was saying after His death, the New Covenant would be established and fasting would take on a whole new dimension. In the New Covenant, the fast His disciples would enter into would be one related to intimacy with Jesus as the Bridegroom. The New Covenant fast is to cause our hearts to move in love and longing for God. When we fast, we are purged of the all the junk in us and room is created for God's grace to fill us up and what we are praying for becomes possible because all things are possible for those who believe (Mark 9:23).

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