

Sunday, November 12, 2006

One week ago, we came to this cathedral after a wonderful banquet at Navy Pier. We were celebrating our centennial with our patriarch, with our hierarchy, with many visiting priests and bishops, and with over a thousand faithful. This week feels very different. Not only are most of these people gone, but we find ourselves confronting Wednesday's start of the St. Philip's fast - our preparation for Christmas. This change from celebration to fasting is an abrupt one. Perhaps the Gospel according to Matthew addresses this issue:

*Then the disciples of John came to [Jesus] saying, "Why do we and the pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast." (Matthew 9: 14-15)*

Whether we like it or not, Jesus is no longer physically present on earth. We can no longer walk with Him, talk with Him, eat with Him. Perhaps we feel this loss more acutely as our time of celebration returns to our old routine. The beginning of our fast only adds to this feeling of emptiness.

But the emptiness of the fast is something which we choose, a hunger which we gladly embrace in anticipation of a greater banquet. Remember: Thanksgiving is coming up. On Thanksgiving Day, will you eat a big breakfast? Of course not! You will want to save room for the big Thanksgiving dinner, so you will probably only have something to drink in the morning: a cup of coffee or tea or milk. If we fast to make room for Thanksgiving dinner, shouldn't we empty ourselves of useless clutter to make room for Christ to come into our lives?

Our fasting needs to be from more than food, it needs to be more than external: it needs to be the external manifestation of a deeper change going on inside of us. Our conversion to the ways of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot just be external, something for others to see: it must be total, changing us though and through. We can see this in the continuation of the Gospel which we just heard:

*"No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins; or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." (Matthew 9: 16-17)*

This year our St. Philip's Fast is special because it leads up to the rededication of our cathedral – both the building and the parish – which we will celebrate on December 10<sup>th</sup>. Like the fast, may the rededication be more than a ritual: may it transform us and our lives so that we can become credible living icons of the Risen Christ Who is present among us, Who lives in and through us, and Whose work of salvation is our vocation as Christians.

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