

It was said about an old man that he endured seventy weeks of fasting, eating only once a week. He asked God about certain words in the Holy Scripture, but God did not answer him. Then he said to himself: "Look, I have put in this much effort, but I haven't made any progress. So now I will go to see my brother and ask him." And when he had gone out, closed the door and started off, an angel of the Lord was sent to him, and said: "Seventy weeks of fasting have not brought you near to God. But now that you are humbled enough to go to your brother, I have been sent to you to reveal the meaning of the words." Then the angel explained the meaning which the old man was seeking, and went away. [Along with fasting there must be humility! Fasting opens the way; it is a means to an end; it is not the end itself.]

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

If you do not forgive everyone who has sinned against you, then do not trouble yourself with fasting. If you do not forgive the debt of your brother, with whom you are angry for some reason, then you fast in vain. God will not accept you. Fasting will not help you, until you will to become accomplished in love and in the hope of faith. Whoever fasts and becomes angry,

and harbors enmity in his heart, such a one hates God and salvation is far from him.

Saint Ephraim the Syrian.

Let your **mind** fast from vain thoughts;
let your **memory** fast from remembering evil;
let your **will** fast from evil desire;
let your **eyes** fast from bad sights: turn away your eyes that you may not see vanity;
let your **ears** fast from vile songs and slanderous whispers;
let your **tongue** fast from slander, condemnation, blasphemy, falsehood, deception, foul language and every idle and rotten word;
let your **hands** fast from killing and from stealing another's goods;
let your **legs** fast from carrying you to evil deeds:
Turn away from evil, and do good.

Saint Ephraim the Syrian.

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The Fathers Speak: About Fasting



Do you see what fasting does? It heals illnesses, drives out demons, removes wicked thoughts, and makes the heart pure. If someone has even been seized by an impure spirit, let him know that "this kind," according to the word of the Lord, "does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matt.17:21).

Saint Athanasius the Great.

It is necessary most of all for one who is fasting to curb anger, to accustom yourself to meekness and lowliness, to have a contrite heart, to repel impure thoughts and desires, to examine your conscience, to put your mind to the test and to verify what good you have done in this or any other week, and what deficiency you have corrected in yourself in the present week. This is true fasting.

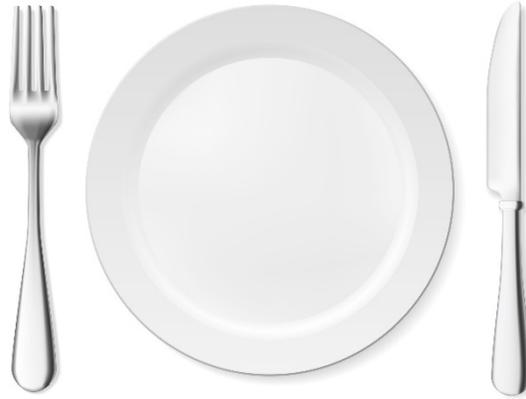
Saint John Chrysostom.

An excellent faster is one who restrains himself from every impurity, who imposes abstinence on his tongue and restrains it from idle talk, foul language, slander, condemnation, flattery and all manner of evil-speaking, who abstains from anger, rage, malice and vengeance and withdraws from every evil.

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk.

By fasting it is possible both to be delivered from future evils and to enjoy the good things to come. We fell into disease through sin; let us receive healing through repentance, which is not fruitful without fasting.

Saint Basil the Great.



There was a man who was leading an ascetic life and not eating bread. He went to visit an old man. It happened that pilgrims also dropped by, and the old man fixed a modest meal for them. When they sat together to eat, the brother who was fasting picked up a single soaked pea and chewed it. When they arose from the table, the old man took the brother aside and said: "Brother, when you go to visit somewhere, do not display your way of life, but if you want to keep to it, stay in your cell and never come out." He accepted what the old man said, and after that behaved like the others whenever he met with them.

[We are reminded here that we are not to make a display of our fasting before others, as the Lord has said: "*But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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*" Matt. 6:17-18]

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

As bodily food fattens the body, so fasting strengthens the soul; imparting to it an easy flight, it makes it able to ascend on high, to contemplate lofty things, and to put the heavenly higher than the pleasant and pleasurable things of life.

Saint John Chrysostom.

I myself once harshly judged a monk whom I saw drinking milk during the Great Fast. He did it so routinely that I thought, "Why, he must think nothing of the ascetic life." It was I who had forgotten the rule of the inner life—that one judges himself and excuses others. I later learned that the monk was ill and had to have milk to ingest his medication. I learned something about hasty judgments.

Sayings of the Desert Fathers