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COME SPIRIT!!

8 Ordinary B-2003 THEME: Fast or Feast, Already or Not Yet, the Tensions of Christianity

Today's Gospel reveals the fundamental tension of Christian life. Jesus is asked why his disciples did not fast while John's did. His response is that while the bridegroom is present, the guests feast. If he were removed, then they would fast.

What is it that we should be doing, feasting or fasting? Jesus is with us as we know from the Resurrection. *The Gospel of Matthew* concludes with the assurance, "I am with you always." Christmas is the celebration of the Son of God's presence on earth. Easter is the celebration of the presence of His Life within us. So shouldn't we be feasting? But the majority of people in the world are hungry right now. Africa is suffering through a terrible famine that America has largely ignored due to its concentration on its own security issues. AIDS has devastated sections of Central and South Africa with whole villages destroyed and others where the elders are eleven years old. All this and far more questions the presence of the Lord. Perhaps, after all, we should be fasting.

Is Christ among us or not? This is the question the earliest or Primitive Church asked itself. It experienced the presence of the Lord, but it still suffered persecution. The primitive church witnessed the killing of its leaders while the immoral pagans became more powerful. "How long, O Lord, How Long!" the blood martyrs called out from under the altar in the *Book of Revelation*. "How long before you come again and set the world straight." Its solution was that we are living in a time of tension, a time of already and not yet. He has already

come, but, he has not yet completed his work. If he had not already come, then we would not be receiving his life in word

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and sacrament, we would not be experiencing his presence in love, we would not be celebrating the his mystery deep within our hearts. But if his work was complete, then there would be no more pain, sorrow, suffering and death in our world.

So the reality of Christian life is that it is lived with both feasting and fasting, joy and sorrow, laughter and tears.

This is the only way that we can make some sense of the continual changes and even turmoil within our lives and our families.

Some people think that because they have accepted Jesus in their lives, then all aspects of life should be happy and perfect. When confronted with a challenge to their happiness, they either blissfully ignore the situation or they become embittered and question their faith. For example, a lady is convinced that all in the world is well and happy and beautiful because she has Jesus in her life. She ignores the reports of pain, suffering and death. She does not allow this to be part of her world. They challenge her pollyanna existence. Perhaps we all behave like this lady when we tune out the needs of the world because all is right within ourselves and our families. Of course, when we do this all is not right. We are in fact tuning out the Presence of the Lord reaching out to us in his needy people, in the demand for Christian solutions to international problems, and so forth.

We all have a greater experience of the second situation.

We think that all aspects of our lives should be happy and then are thoroughly devastated when we or our family comes into crisis. A man, for example, has changed his life style from the pagan days of his early 20's to becoming a deeply committed

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Christian. The words of Joshua ring true in his home, "As for me and my family, we will follow the Lord." But then a personal crisis hits. He become critically ill, worse still, his wife, his love, becomes sick or even worse, one of his children, one of his treasures, becomes terminal. The man is devastated as he should be. Then he questions the very existence of God. This sickness doesn't fit into his concept of what a Christian life should be like. All should be happy. People should not become sick, let alone die.

We all do this. We would like to imagine ourselves in Paradise because we have made a commitment to the Lord. The problem is that we are not in Paradise. We are on earth, a very imperfect earth where sin and death wreck havoc on the innocent.

This is the tension of Christianity. Jesus is here, but the he has not yet completed the conquest of sin. The battle against sin is still being waged, not just by Jesus, but by all the members of his Kingdom. So, then, we celebrate his presence among us, but we also fast joining our sacrifices to the sacrifice of the Lord on the Cross. We battle the forces of evil that are devastating the world, as well as our own personal lives.

Lent begins this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. The ashes are not a blessing, even though people who do not go to Church regularly will show up here looking for ashes, but not

wanting to receive communion. The ashes are a symbol, a symbol of imperfection. When we are signed with the ashes this Wednesday we are making a statement that we recognize the personal battle we must put up against sin in the world in general and in our lives in particular.

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It is that time of the year for us to fast. By doing so we are joining our sacrifices with the Lord as the Kingdom does battle against evil in the world.

Now, I am going to get real mystical on you. We are all part of the grand scheme of the Kingdom of God. Our every good deed, our every prayer, our every sacrifice is a rifle shot in a battle that is part of the great war. Our every sin is a surrender to the power of evil, a defeat for the Kingdom.

Famine, AIDS, selfishness within the home, the evils of all societies, will all be defeated when the Lord comes to conclude the war. But although he has already come 2000 years ago, he has not yet completed his mission. He is depending on us to join him in battle.

Our lifestyle is enmeshed in the tension of the already but not yet, in the tension of the feast or the fast, in the tension of Christianity at war with the devil. If a crisis should strike us personally or within our families, or if we should come out of a self absorbed shell to recognize the need of so many suffering people of the world, then we need to use this pain, this recognition as an opportunity to go to war against the power of evil.

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Jesus has given us the strength of his presence, we celebrate. But his battle must continue for the war goes on until He returns. And so, we fast.