Session Five Fasting by Silence

As much as we may think fasting is about forgoing food and drink and how difficult that can be, it pales in comparison to this one. Remaining quiet in the face of criticism particularly false accusations and maybe outright lies. You choose to say nothing on your behalf. This fast in not defending oneself is most challenging. When someone speaks poorly of us oh how we want to cry out our innocence and prove that we are the innocent victim. Actually we probably want to go on the attack mode and give it right back. We want to point out the accuser’s faults and shortcomings, and if we can let others know. But in this form of fasting we don’t; we remain quiet. Even if we are innocent and it is all a lie we don’t respond. We keep quiet .We let people think what they will. Think about how difficult that is. It seems unjust and not fair. Everyone is worthy of a good name and reputation. True but we offer that as our fast. I once thought it was a big thing to pray for one’s enemies. It seemed so noble and gracious but really how difficult is it? Let’s be honest we can all whip up a prayer and pray for their welfare even if we mean it halfheartedly, if at all. No, what is most difficult in this fast is refraining from speech. We keep silent when it would be so easy to explain and defend oneself. We hold our tongue when an explanation will put us back in the good light or demonstrate how we are the innocent victims. We give up the right to defend ourselves. We forego the gratification of presenting our side of the story and receiving the sympathy and consolation from others. Like Jesus before Pilate we remain silent.

This is a grace that only God can give. This silence witnesses to the grace of God and our inner conversion.

“Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing”1 Peter 3:9

This form of fasting is probably new to you as it is to me. I have never heard a homily on it or any teaching. It demands a special grace. We sacrifice our good name and reputation which perhaps could be cleared up so easily. It leads one not to worry about what others may think or say but concern oneself only in how God sees us. The truth will win out perhaps not soon enough but it will. If it is any consolation those who know and love us won’t be easily swayed. Consider following the advice of Mother Teresa “If someone criticizes you, first ask yourself, is it right? If he is right, apologize and change, and the issue is resolved. If he is not right, clarify and correct, but if that does not work, take up the unjust accusations with both hands and offer it to Jesus in union with his suffering, because he was slandered by all sides.”

Stick and stones may break my bones but names will never harm me. Agree?

Has anyone destroyed your reputation if so how did you react?

What do value more your reputation or your character?

Why do you think we enjoy hearing about the faults and downfall of celebrities or people that we know?

What would you rather endure physical pain or public criticism?