Columns
Spirituality



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Usually around this time of the year, I begin to ponder what I may want to do for the season of Lent. But this year, I seem to be thinking less about what practices *I* can do, and more about seeking the dispositions to help me graciously accept what *God* is doing in my life.

Last October I celebrated 80 years of life with great gratitude to God for the many graces and blessings received throughout my life. But turning 80 seems to have given me a different perspective and has brought me starkly face-to-face with the ongoing losses and diminishments I am experiencing presently, and the inevitable future of continued diminishments and losses. Life seems to be offering me many opportunities to acknowledge my vulnerability, make friends with the inevitability of loss, and allow God to fill the emptiness and inner space these create.

Perhaps it is one of the gifts of the "maturing" years, but I find myself praying for the grace to be open to what life brings and accepting all difficulties in union with Jesus and his cross. My daily prayer is to be faithful and to age with gratitude, dignity and grace. So maybe this Lent, I need to focus on those three virtues, and perhaps they are virtues we want to ask for and acquire at any age or stage of life.

What does this look like for me? Several years ago, at Francis House of Prayer, St. Joseph Sr. Marcy Springer presented a practical format with which to pray during Lent. It is a simple comparison of what one wants to *fast* from, and what one wants to *feast* on regarding virtues and good habits. *Feasting* on gratitude, dignity and grace means *fasting* from those opposite tendencies which draw me away from practicing and living these qualities.

Feasting on *gratitude* requires a definite frame of mind which looks at the opportunities for good, growth and acceptance in any situation. There is an obvious need for *fasting* from worry, anxiety, fear, wanting things to go my way, and negative cultural and worldly influence, and *feasting* on acceptance, trusting in God's goodness and providence, focusing on what is possible and good, seeing new

opportunities to love and serve, and meeting diminishments and losses with unshakable faith in God's steadfast love and presence.

How do I define *dignity* and how do I *feast* on it? I think it is a sense of my real identity as a child of God, made in God's image and likeness. I am a uniquely, unrepeatable expression of God in the world. It is this identity that guides my thoughts, words and actions. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, I am free to make Godly choices in all life's circumstances and encounters. For me, it is the strength of the Holy Spirit which enlightens and empowers a life lived from this core identity in obedience to God's will.

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As Sisters of St. Joseph associates, we were given a set of Maxims, short admonitions from Jesuit Fr. Jean Pierre Medaille, the founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Maxim 36 advises, "Stay rooted in who you are to God — one loved and called." Maxim 54 admonishes, "Witness courageously that no one less than God has any power over you." *Fasting* from selfishness, impatience, anger, pride, stubbornness, and my false self-image while *feasting* on the reality of who I really am in union with Jesus, will help me live that dignity which he always modeled in his life.

For me, God's *grace* has many faces. It is the strength to do good and overcome evil, sinful or negative tendencies; it is God's mercy, benevolence, forgiveness and healing. It is the constant and continuous stream of God's presence, power and providence each moment of every day.

Maxim 84 tells me: "Wait to be led by grace. Follow it when it comes." While following that grace, Maxim 80 advises: "Don’t focus on measuring your progress. Trust grace at work in you." And Maxim 58 warns, "We can put obstacles in the path of God's grace. Be aware." Living with *grace* requires *feasting* on openness, discernment, willingness and responsiveness to follow God’s lead and *fasting* from

my misdirected desires, plans and expectations.

I would like to suggest that you consider designing your own "*fasting-feasting*" program under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. What is it you want to do, or be? What do you need to *feast* on to accomplish that desire? What is it you want to let go of, or change? What may you need to *fast* from? Perhaps a sample of what my fasting-feasting chart might look like will inspire you to design your own as guided by the Spirit.

Judy Principe's fasting-feasting chart

Fast from	**Feast on**
Anxiety	Trust
Fear	Faith in God's providence
My way	Acceptance and surrender
Cultural negativity	Hope
Selfishness	God-centeredness
False identity	True identity
Pride	Humility
Expectations	Openness

Of course, each of these needs to be explored and defined into practical living which will be part of my Lenten prayer and practice. Maybe it will work for you as well!