

*Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*July 31, 2022*  
*Year of Saint Joseph*

*“Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!” (Ecclesiastes 1:2)*

“Vanity of vanities; all things are vanity!” As we listen again to these words of King Solomon taken from the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes, we are reminded of the proper outlook a righteous person must have concerning this world and its material things. I could just Google a homily from the multitude available on this one verse and present it to you. Honestly, would you not know the difference? You still get a homily and I am not required to pray and reflect upon this verse. Instead, I could choose to do something else, indulging myself in some other pleasurable activity. Yet as King Solomon states in the next chapter, even this is vanity. For, be it the gathering of material possessions or the satisfying of human desires, ALL things under the sun are fleeting.

As I reflected upon this thought something happened – my stomach grumbled. I realized I had not eaten. Like a bolt of lightning, it struck me – I had not eaten. I tried to calculate the time I spend in a day preparing for and consuming food which passes from the lips to the hips (we know where it goes, but for the sake of little ears). Food, no matter how good it is, no matter how well prepared it is, no matter how expensive or inexpensive it is, no matter how much I enjoy it, no matter how it can bring families together, food, in my desire to both fill a need and pleasure my senses, is still a vanity, for food is fleeting. But Father Saucier, think of all the memories and happy times families have had around the dinner table. Yes, granted these are good and beautiful things, however could those beautiful family memories still be experienced without food? What if we tried something different? What if we instead prayed and fasted as a family.

Right now, either someone reading this homily or listening as I offer it has just reminded themselves that this is not Lent. Yes, to whomever you are who thought this, you are completely correct, it is not Lent. I say this because this was my initial thought when the idea of fasting associated with the vanity of food came into my mind. The next thought was a question posed to myself: Do I need it to be Lent for me to fast? Could I not fast at other times during the Church’s liturgical year? Sure, I could fast, but why would I want to? What benefit would I gain from fasting outside of the Lenten season?

Anyone could do what I next did. I went to the YouTube and searched the benefits of fasting. I never knew there were that many videos on fasting and how beneficial fasting can truly be for your body. Whether it is 12, 24, 48, or 72 hours, there were benefits to be gained. I even learned about the world record holder Angus Barbieri who fasted for 382 days. Now, when I added the word catholic to my search, I found an almost equal number of videos reminding me of the spiritual benefits of fasting. For without the opportunity for spiritual growth, fasting for itself can become a vanity. For even our health and bodies are slowly becoming more feeble as we age.

Allow me to offer you one spiritual benefit I was reminded of as I watched these videos. It is taken from the Gospel of Saint Matthew, chapter 17. Directly after the Transfiguration of Jesus upon the mountain, Jesus, accompanied by Peter, James and John, descends the mountain only to be greeted by a multitude of people surrounding a father, his possessed son, and Jesus’ disciples. Despite their most prayerful efforts, the disciples cannot free the child from the demon’s grasp. With a word, Jesus

frees the child from his demonic possessor and returns him to his father. Later, when asked why they could not expel this demon, remember please, the disciples had expelled demons from possessed people on prior missionary journeys, Jesus must inform them that there are those demons who are naturally stronger than others and this kind can only be expelled by prayer and fasting. The spiritual benefit I offer you today is this – fasting strengthens prayer. And, since many of you are parents who want to protect your children as much as this father in Saint Matthew’s Gospel, then you too must fast. As adults, we see the influence of the Devil upon our society, especially in this new movement to introduce our elementary children to highly questionable and explicit lifestyle choices without the informed consent of their parents. We are told that we are the uneducated bigots because we want to protect our children from this demonic influence. This kind of demon must be expelled and we must fast and pray to accomplish this task. Please, do not wait for Lent 2023. Add fasting to your prayer life now. Let us, as a parish family, offer one day a week when we shall fast and pray, not only for ourselves and our children, but for all parents and children, for their protection during these darkest times. May the meal I choose not to eat and the prayers I choose to offer assist one soul allowing them to draw closer to God that day?