

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 3/4/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

I noticed this week that McDonalds has lowered the price of their Filet-O-Fish sandwich. For Lent. Because many Roman Catholics restrict their diet during Lent to mostly or only fish. At least on Friday. That's why many restaurants offer fish specials on Friday. Over the years of my ministry, I've had several members remark on the power that Roman Catholics have so that countless dining establishments serve fish for them.

How did this come about? Well, and to a degree this is revisionist history, in the early Christian community, Easter was a special time for baptism and for receiving new members. This was preceded by Lent which was a time, forty days, for study and preparation for baptism. Baptismal candidates were expected to fast or abstain from eating to help them understand how difficult it would be to eliminate sinful behavior from one's life.

Now, forty days without food would likely be impossible and even fatal. But you could eat on Sundays, since the Sundays during this season of preparation were "in" Lent, but not "of" Lent. Sundays are little Easters and times to celebrate the resurrection—with food, too. So, fasting was Monday through Saturday for the nearly seven weeks of Lent.

But, fasting for six days a week was so difficult and there was so much protest, that the requirement was lessened to giving up meat for the days in Lent. Yet, this too, was challenging, so it soon was reduced to giving up meat on Fridays—the day upon which Christ died. Even still, many found giving up meat on Friday too restrictive, so the stipulation was again relaxed to simply allowing fish as the one meat that could be eaten—on Fridays—during Lent.

The idea of giving something up for Lent is a good discipline to make us aware of the impossibility of ending sinful actions and words from our behavior. That is, so long as you choose something that is very challenging. Giving up dessert for Lent, or eating out, or Facebook, or similar things is not really that great a hardship, if you're honest about it. If you really want to understand the struggle of abstaining from sin, try giving up your car, or your bed, or bathing, or eating, or whatever would be extremely hard and nearly undoable for the forty days of Lent. Understand, though, that the reason for giving something up is to help us recognize our need for Christ's sacrifice for sin, because we simply can't do it on our own. We can't live a life that is worthy of God's love. Yet, God loves us anyway, and God offers Christ in place of our sin so that we are freed from the struggle to earn God's love—which, again, we already have. So, instead of giving something up for Lent, I suggest taking something extra on, just as Christ took on the cross for us.

So, that is why there are so many fish specials during this season and on Fridays. And if you are one who wonders why the Roman Catholics have so much power to cause restaurants to do this for them, let me remind you that restaurants serve coffee every day for the Lutherans (wink, wink)!

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey