FOCUS FASTING

A Reflection on the Great Fast by Father Athanasios Demos

At my old age I have come to realize that I personally need to focus fast during Lent and all other fasting periods of the Ecclesiastical year. As in most cases I have focused on what I should or should not eat and how much I should or should not eat. Food has been the focus that has absorbed my attention. Now as I grow older I find myself leaning towards a different focus…not so centered on the particular details on what and how much I eat, rather to focus on eating much less and of that which is healthier for my body – vitamin packed vegetables, less carbohydrates.

I have found over the years that many people become nervous, uptight and irritable during fasting periods because they are struggling to control their appetites and discipline their bodies. While the food fast is meant to reflect on the spiritual struggle against sin – that is to fast from sin - this latter focus seems to dissipate, as the food struggle becomes more and more of a central focus. Our friends may correct us if they see us eating something that is not "fasting food" yet laugh at an off-color joke or use of profanity. "You shouldn't eat that if you're *really* Orthodox…" What about – "You shouldn't say, think or do that if you're *really* Orthodox"? We don't dare delve into the sin aspect of fasting, but we do dare to focus on food.

Perhaps our focus should intensify in concentrating on the real focus fast – to focus on what I should or should not think…to focus on what I should or should not say…to focus on what I should or should not do. My focus fast should center on what that person in the mirror eats and how much he eats…on what he thinks and how he thinks…on what he says and why he says it…on what he does and why and how he does it.

I can't speak for you; I can only speak for myself. I think that this Lent I'm going to do my best to concentrate intensely on fasting from my thoughts, words and deeds…asking myself why I think, say and do things…what reasoning or excuse do I have for thinking saying or doing things…and whether my thoughts, words and deeds are hurtful or beneficial to others and to myself. Most of all I must reflect on my thoughts words and deeds and ask if they bring Glory to Almighty God. If they don't then even my strictest fast in every form may be hypocritical. If they do, then the Easter Resurrection Service will bring an even deeper sense of joy in knowing that in some small way fasting brought my unworthy soul closer to God. I pray that God will bless you so that - in all its forms and to whatever degree - your fast may bring you even closer to Almighty God! In fact, let's pray for one another – that by being closer to one another, we will all become even closer to God. I pray that we experience a most blessed, inspiring and holy Lent!

Fr. Al Demos serves as Chancellor of the Metropolis of Boston.