

February 8, 2008  
Friday after Ash Wednesday

Readings of the day may be found on the following link:

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab>

Isaiah 58:1-9a

Psalms 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 18-19

Matthew 9:14-15

*Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."*

I have always struggled with understanding this passage. I am not sure that I understand it today. But I do know how it speaks to me. I have come to experience fasting as a way to weed out the clutter in my heart. It is no longer just about food. It is about making room for Jesus. I remember so many times in my life that I have exclaimed, after a grand meal, that I am so full there is not room for one more bite. As I reflect on this passage today, I see that there are so many things that can fill me which leave no room in my heart for the message of Jesus. Just looking at the advertising in our culture shows us how we fill ourselves up with self-satisfying stuff. There is a sign at the entrance of a local mall that says, *where our wants become needs*. I know that I have mentioned this before, but it astounds me each time I see it. What astounds me is not so much the sign, but the fact that we, I, buy into it again and again and again. A friend of mine recently suggested, while we were indulging ourselves with one of our favorite treats—dark chocolate, that Lent would be a good time to practice some discipline. The discipline she suggested was not that we do without the chocolate, but that we eat only one piece per day. At first we dismissed it as another way to avoid doing without, but as I thought about it, I recalled all the times I indulged myself with more than I need. I remembered a recent shopping trip where I bought two of each necessary item thinking that while one was in the laundry, I would *need* the other. As I prayed with this passage, it occurred to me that if my heart is full of what I want for me then there is no room to hear what Jesus wants for me. I cannot fill myself up with my personal self-serving desires and empty myself at the same time. So, in response to my friend's challenge, I put a bag in my closet into which I am to put all the items I do not need. It is a harder task than I imagined to be truthful with myself about what I *really* need and what I do not *really* need.

*"When the stomach is full, it is easy to talk of fasting" ~ St. Jerome*

What desires fill me? From what do I need to fast?