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Lent and the quest for beauty

Fasting in the Christian tradition is a means of seeking spiritual growth. It is a means of coming to inner beauty, writes Clare Condon SGS.

BY Clare Condon SGS*

As children, my mother often told us it was wise to be wary of beauty that was only skin deep. Over the past number of weeks, especially following Christmas and New Year celebrations, our media has been full of ads for weight loss programmes and commentary about the increasing market for cosmetic surgery from both women and men.

It would seem that such an emphasis operates on the belief of many that beauty is fundamentally only skin deep and needs to be achieved if one is to live a fulfilling life. Get our looks and our bodies right and all will be well!

In a society such as Australia where the growing diseases are obesity and diabetes, then yes, we should be seeking to change diets and increase exercise to be a healthier nation of people. But I question the underlying principle that life is of a better quality if our looks match the magazine profiles presented to us. It all seems superficial and only skin deep! So where is the substance?

It is paradoxical that in most western countries we are dealing with the consequences of excess – even the excess of finances that can be used to produce a more acceptable nose, a smoothing of wrinkles, or a face lift so that one can appear to be eternally young. This is happening while many people in our world simply do not have enough resources to survive. The famine of Somalia is just one example of this great inequality that exists now in our world.

So does this have anything to say to us Christians, who tomorrow (February 22) commence the season of Lent?

During Lent, the Church encourages us to fast. Fasting for any other purpose than to reduce one's weight or to improve one's health doesn't seem to hold any sway or understanding in our world. Why fast in order to work on one's inner beauty? It sounds a bit far-fetched does it not? And yet, fasting has been an integral part of most religious traditions for hundreds of years. It is certainly part of our Christian heritage.

Fasting in the Christian tradition is a means of seeking spiritual growth. It is a means of coming to inner beauty. It is a self discipline which aims to curb one's natural inclinations to excesses of the body, mind or heart.

Fasting is always aligned with prayer and coming closer to the experience of God in one's life. It is about coming to a place of peace and love, where one can reach out beyond self to the needs of another. Saying "no" to oneself is a difficult self discipline and not for its own sake. It is not a way to exaggerate one's own capacity for discipline, nor should it be an excess in its own right.

Fasting is part of a wholesome attitude to life and inner growth. It is a discipline that is meant to lead to an inner beauty that of itself will shine forth in how we live our daily lives and interact with others. One can grow from a place of self-centredness to other-centredness. Fasting should never be glorified in its own right, but should only be part of an integrated life seeking inner wholeness and beauty.

On this day before Lent commences, my challenge is to find what I need to do over the next 40 days that will assist in my spiritual growth – to enhance my inner self and hopefully my inner beauty.

What will you decide to do?

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Source: <http://www.goodsams.org.au/good-oil/lent-and-the-quest-for-beauty/>