

Is Fasting Moral Heroism?

Fr. Max' Homily on the joined celebration of KSG and KMKI

26 February 2023 KSG Berlin – KMKI Berlin

On the first joint mass of KSG and KMKI on 26 February 2023, Father Max reflects about the meaning of fasting. It's not only about moral heroism or discipline, but about the deeper roots of our spiritual quest.

Dear Brothers and sisters,

today we celebrate the first Sunday of Lenten time, and I am happy that we have the chance to celebrate it together with KMKI and KSG! As far as I know it's the first time since ever – or at least for a long time, as nobody can remember such a common celebration.

The difference between KMKI and KSG is mainly the language and the cultural background: My Indonesian is still very weak, indeed much weaker than Father Patrisius' German skills. And I lost hope to catch up one day. I have been once in Indonesia, in Java and Bali, and I remember how fascinating this beautiful country was for me, especially because it is the biggest Muslim country in the world. I know that in some areas there are difficulties, but generally there is peace among Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and other religions. And it can be a model for the whole world!

The members of KSG are not only from Germany as many people think, but there is a huge number of students from countries from all over the world: Latin America, Asia, sometimes people from Africa, and of course from other countries in Europe. With all the differences of our cultural background, I would say that we all struggle to find an appropriate way to live our Christian faith in a city like Berlin. This city is particularly secularized, and faith seems to be something absolutely private. When I was in Indonesia, I noticed that it's not the case there, and also in the countries in Latin America, faith was part of the public sphere.

When I realised the Gospel of today – the temptation of Jesus in the desert - I immediately thought: That's the perfect image of a young person coming to Berlin! So many temptations right and left: Partying night and day, everything goes! If you want to experience something unusual: You will find people with whom you can do it! I am not speaking of the temptation to use drugs... But I know that in certain circles it's a real problem!

I am happy, that this kind of problems is – I hope so – not your issue!

As you are all responsible student's you may think of "temptation" when it comes to study: You must finish a paper: But instead of working on it, you watch YouTube Videos, Instagram or Snapchat. (And I know what I am talking about – I love cat videos!) Or friends propose to

go out, and you accept happily instead of finishing your work. You are asked to do something for KSG or KMKI, and you find it difficult to say no! It's always hard to say no, and you always find good reasons to do things you should not do!

Here we are talking about discipline. It's not a nice concept, but it is true, that we need discipline in our lives, because there are always things, we don't like to do: Like writing bachelor or master thesis...

The problem is: We should not mix up the concept of discipline and self-control we experience sometimes in our lives, with the issues we are talking about in our today's Gospel! When Jesus was tempted by the devil, he did not just make an effort to say no! It goes much deeper! And that's very important for us!

Jesus was not a moral hero. Not somebody who just had the strength, that so many students and young people in the city of sin like Berlin are missing. In the Gospel of the temptation in the desert we can see how deep Jesus was rooted in God's love, which gave him the strength to keep being united to God! But because Jesus was not only God's son, but true human being, he also experienced our deepest temptations!

But if these temptations are not a matter of self-control or discipline: What's the matter?

I would say that there are two main problems we must face in our spiritual life – and it depends on our character which one is predominant:

One temptation is the "hubris", which is a kind of overestimation of one's own capabilities. Being Human means to acknowledge that we are created by God, that we need to accept that we were weak, that we have limits. Already the ancient Greeks defined "Hubris" as the temptation to be like God, to consider yourself being your own God.

Maybe you are thinking now in people who are very self-confident or even arrogant. Can be, but not only. There are people, who are not at all arrogant, but they are unable to accept their own limits and not capable to trust in something bigger than themselves! By doing so they stress because we are not Gods. They overcharge themselves. We need to accept our bonds we have to other human beings and, ultimately, to our God, our Creator.

The other temptation is "fear". In today's Gospel Jesus was offered all reigns of the earth. And sometimes we also think that we should take all possible opportunities by fear to miss out something. In German we say "zu kurz kommen". This happens to people with a lack of self-esteem and trust. They always feel robbed by others who have more luck, who look nicer, who have more success! In the bottom of our hearts there is the fear not being loved which leads us to grab whatever we can to reassure our value.

You see: All this doesn't make us happy! It leads to a kind of alienation. We are not ourselves, but slaves of what we would like to be.

What does it mean for us at the beginning of our Lenten time? You are invited to consider your temptations: Not only if you are eating chocolate or you're not studying 12 hours every

day! We must consider where in our hearts we put our trust in things which are leading us away from ourselves and from God!

The external things like not drinking alcohol or not eating chocolate are not meant to show how disciplined we are, but to re-discover what we really need in our lives. Where our fears lead us to be not ourselves and not to be rooted in God.

Therefore, in this Lenten time we are invited to think about the question: where do I put my trust? Where does fear prevent me to be myself? Where do I put my confidence only in myself, in a kind of hubris, which leads me away from God?

Sometimes, it is hard to acknowledge we went away from God. And that's why Lenten time has a penitential character. But to rediscover that we are sons and daughters of God fills us with joy. That's why we heard on Ash Wednesday:

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting.... But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

Rediscover God's love for us which changes our lives: That's the essence of Lenten time. This love will be revealed and celebrated on Easter – full of joy!

Amen.