

Don't forget to feast this Lent

By [David Henson](#)

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*Life was merrier when the Christians were still among us, not least because almost every one of their days was the feast of some saint. Little work was done, it seemed, but at least their revelry was infectious.*

— Iskander the Potter, [Birds Without Wings](#)

Don't forget to feast this Lent.

In the midst of the almsgiving, praying, and fasting that traditionally mark this season, remember also to feast.

But only on Sundays.

For Christians, every Sunday is a feast day, and fasting is forbidden at a feast. And, it would be downright rude—to the host, to others at the feast, and to yourself—to fast in the midst of a feast.

Of course, feasting isn't the first thought that comes to mind in Lent, especially in the popular imagination. But, in many ways, it is the most important part.

Some Christians tend to think of Lent only in terms of deprivation, discipline, and rigorous religiosity. Others might malign it as encouraging a kind of mind-body dualism in which the body is battered into submission or the spirit edified at the expense of the repression of the body. Others have criticized Lent, explaining they don't need the church to dictate a special season for them to draw close to God.

These criticisms tend to forget about that one critical element: the Lenten feast.

Now, before anyone protests, the feasts of Lent are certainly on the more somber side of things, with all the minor chords and buried Alleluias. But the Sundays during Lent are still celebrations. The Eucharist is never a dirge. It is always a celebration and not just of God's love and of Jesus' life. It is also a celebration of our

participation in that divine mystery. It is an invitation to a party in which we can touch the hem of divinity—and sometimes more. It is an embodied celebration and a celebration of bodies, particularly God’s own body.

So how can we experience God on Sunday in the Eucharist and taste God’s radical love and acceptance of us, and go back immediately to fasting? We can’t.

That’s why Sundays are for feasting. They are feasts of love.

For many, feasting is synonymous with gluttony and overeating. But a Lenten feast isn’t simply about warming up the leftovers from Fat Tuesday and eating of a fast’s forbidden fruit. Nor is it a matter of discovering and exploiting with mischievous glee the great Lenten Loophole. Feasting in Lent reminds us that as people of faith a feast isn’t about eating all the pancakes, or chocolate, or potatoes and bread, and it isn’t about spending all day amusing ourselves to death.

Binging, no matter what our obsessive-consumptive society tells us, is not feasting.

Feasting is not about having more than you need. A godly feast happens when everyone has enough. Lenten feasts should remind us of that.

In a season in which we rightfully deprive ourselves of one of the thousands of luxuries at our fingertips, feasting on Sundays in Lent reminds us that joy and happiness are centered in something deeper than distractions and fatty foods. It reminds us that, as citizens of the world’s wealthiest country, we use the luxuries of life to placate our desires rather than understand them, to numb our humanity rather than live into it, to suppress our hunger and thirst for justice rather than feast upon it.

Feasting in Lent is a unique journey all its own, one often neglected theologically. Lenten feasts invite us to discover how to celebrate life without subduing our bodies with luxuries. They offer us a chance to discover what a true feast is, embodied not by overeating and hoarding but by sharing and sacrifice, enacted not by consuming as much as we can in a day but enacted by a community that gathers and believes, against all evidence to the contrary, that Jubilee exists and the arc of the universe bends towards justice.

That’s why Sundays are for feasting. They are feasts of faith.

Indeed, isn't this the point of any Sunday feast? To imagine a world where Jubilee happens: where debts are forgiven, where oppression is ended, where liberation is won? Isn't this the feast of a Sunday: To believe, if only for the few seconds when the bread and wine hit our lips, that God's reign of love exists and we are its agents in the world? Isn't this the feast of a Sunday, to glimpse the potential of our humanity as God's holy agents, entrusted with the great commission of bringing God's divine Jubilee to earth as it is in heaven?

A Lenten feast is one that celebrates our bodies by seeing them as *tov*—good, divine, creative. It is an embodied feast in which our bodies are not vehicles for pleasure, or exploitation, or oppression, or money-making, or objectification, but bodies that exist simply because they are good, and, if we have eyes to see them, divine images of love in a world given to hate. A Lenten feast celebrates the future, a future in which we boldly proclaim our agency, our creativity, and our independence [from the evil we do to ourselves, the evil we do to others, and the evil done on our behalf.](#)

A Lenten feast calls us to reclaim our bodies from a world that twists them, makes us feel naked and ashamed for them, turns them into gears for war machines and profit and abuse. A Lenten feast calls us to embody God in the world, because it is only through our bodies that the world can change. A Lenten feast helps us to see the Promised Land in the middle of dry and thirsting land.

That's why Sundays are for feasting. They are feasts of hope.

Perhaps, when the 40 days of fasting are finished, the greatest lesson to learn from a holy Lent is how to feast.

*Originally posted at [Henson's blog](#)*