**A lesson plan for Y7 on fasting.**

**Fasting**

**Time:** 1 hour + homework task

**Resources:**

* Bibles
* Story of CAFOD video
* Access to CAFOD website
* Paper and pens/suitable software, if designing posters
* PowerPoint presentation for teachers delivering this lesson

**Curriculum links:** This lesson would form part of a unit addressing outcomes related to fasting during Lent.

**Learning objectives:** By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

* define fasting
* understand Catholic teaching on fasting, and its foundations in scripture
* explain some reasons why Catholics fast in solidarity with people living in poverty
* explain how CAFOD Family Fast Day is a response to the Lenten practices of fasting, prayer and almsgiving
* understand Pope Francis’ teaching on the dangers of “so-whatism”.

They will also:

• have had an opportunity to respond in a practical way to what they have learned.

**Starter (5 mins)**

Project this story onto the whiteboard or leave copies on desks, so that students can start to read the story and ponder the questions as others are entering.

*Callum really, really wanted that new football jersey. His mum had put her foot down saying, “I don’t have a spare £50! You only got a new jersey six months ago; it still fits. And you need a new school blazer.” But Callum’s grandad had a season ticket and had promised to take Callum to a few matches during the summer holidays. Callum didn’t want to be wearing outdated kit.*

*So, he did a deal with his mum. They agreed he would not ask her to buy chocolate or crisps for his lunchbox for the next two months. Callum reckoned this would save £26 off the shopping bill. He would also give up the Saturday night takeaway every other weekend and have shop-bought pizza instead. That should save another £24. Sorted!*

Questions: Recall a time when you gave up one thing to get something else. What motivated you? How did it feel? Was it difficult?

**Introduction (5 mins)**

Go through the learning objectives.

Today we are finding out about fasting. What is fasting? (Take some ideas).

Show the definition:

‘Fasting’: to abstain from *(give up)* all or some kinds of food or drink for a fixed amount of time, especially as a religious observance.

How does fasting relate to the story we just read about Callum? (He ‘fasted’ from chocolate, crisps and takeaways for two months in order to get a football jersey.)

Some people fast from a meal or a type of food during special religious seasons like Ramadan or Lent. Why do they do this? Are *they* looking to get something? (They want to remove some of the things that distract them from focussing on God, and free their hearts to turn towards God, get to know God better and become better witnesses.)

**History of Fasting (1 min)**

Where does fasting come from; when did it start? We don’t know exactly, and it probably has more than one origin, but we do know it has been around a very long time. It was already common by the time of Jesus. Matthew’s Gospel says that the Pharisees and the apostles of John the Baptist both fasted (Matt 9:14). And Jesus began his ministry with a time of prayer and fasting.

**Fasting in scripture and the early Church (10 mins)**

See if you can find a passage in your Bible near the start of Matthew’s Gospel that tells us this. (Ask for a volunteer to read).

Matthew 4:1-4: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’

Why does the gospel say that Jesus fasted for *forty* days and nights? What does that number remind you of? (40 years wandering in the desert). The Bible often uses numbers to remind people of something important. The early Christians in the Jewish tradition would have known the Old Testament very well. When Matthew said ‘40’ they’d immediately remember the Israelites in the desert, being tested, getting to know God better, and preparing to enter the Promised Land, and know that Jesus’ time in the desert was a time of testing and preparation, spent with God in prayer.

Christians have always had times of fasting, as Jesus did. Especially during a time of year in the Church’s calendar that lasts 40 days and prepares people for Easter. What is that time called? (Lent)

Jesus said that his followers would fast, and he described what that should be like. (Ask students to find Matthew 6:16-18):

“Whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Jesus also would have known the Old Testament very well. And the prophet Isaiah said:

*[For an illustrated PowerPoint of the following passage, go to CAFOD website and search “Isaiah 58”]*

Isaiah 58:6-7: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

So, according to scripture and Catholic tradition, fasting is not to be boasted about, nor is it focused in on the individual. It is about freeing one’s heart to be more open to God and reach out to others.

**Fasting in action (10 mins)**

How do Catholics put this practice of fasting into action?

In monasteries, fasting is a regular part of the lives of nuns or monks. Many are vegetarian and eat even simpler food during Lent.

But ordinary Catholics fast too, in different ways. For example, they are called to do some form of self-denial on Fridays – the day that Jesus died. And, during Lent, Catholics are called to abstain from meat on Fridays, and to also eat less on Good Friday and Ash Wednesday.

Let’s watch a video that tells the story of something that happened during Lent 60 years ago.

Show the Story of CAFOD video (2:30) at <https://vimeo.com/486345947/cd114b189a> Ask students to look out for what the women in the story did, and for what motivated them (why they did this).

Discuss – What did the women do? What motivated them? The video does not say this, but their actions took place during Lent – what impact might that have had on the number of people who took part? (Catholics were fasting during Lent. Family Fast Day gave a way for them to fast together and, together, to help their global family by ‘*almsgiving*’).

The video says, “At any point (while the women were fundraising) doubt could have crept in: ‘It’s not really worth doing - there’s too much need’.” Why do you think, as Catholics, the women carried on despite global poverty being so huge a problem? (Take answers. Answers could include: The women’s actions influenced others to act. In Matthew 25, Jesus said, “Whatever you did to the least of these… you did it to me.” The Catholic Social Teaching principle ‘Preferential option for the poor’ calls Catholics to prioritise the poorest and most vulnerable. Catholics are called to act as God would act.)

As the video also says, [CLICK] “We can’t do much, but we could do something”.

Pope Francis says:

“Some claim you need a healthy dose of ‘So-whatism’ to get through life, because if you start worrying about what you see, how are you ever going to relax?

…The attitude of the Lord is completely different, at the opposite pole. God is never indifferent.

…That’s why we must become aware of this so-whatism and open ourselves to the blows that reach us now from every corner of the globe.

…What can we do? How can I help? What is God asking of us at this time? In asking these questions -- perhaps before a lit candle – we open ourselves to the action of the Spirit. We can start to discern, to see new possibilities, at least in the little things that surround us.

…As we commit to these small things, we start to imagine another way of living together… We can begin to dream of real change, change that is possible.”

Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*, pp.19-20.

Family Fast Day still happens twice a year, once in Lent and once at Harvest, when every Catholic parish in England and Wales is asked to fast and donate to CAFOD. Many Catholic schools fundraise too. CAFOD uses the donations to work in solidarity alongside communities around the world that are tackling poverty and injustice.

**Respond (30 mins + homework)**

Invite students to respond to this lesson by taking part in CAFOD Family Fast Day.

Ask students to choose one activity:

* Either adapt CAFOD Lent assembly materials to prepare their own assembly for another class in school. Resources can be found at cafod.org.uk/secondary/lent.
* Or prepare a set of corridor posters that explain and encourage participation in your school’s Fast Day activities.
* Or write an insert for your school’s website or newsletter to explain and encourage participation in your school’s Fast Day activities.

At the end of the lesson, review the learning objectives and ask students to finish their task for homework.