Presentation Challenge Summary

Day 2

Eating clean means eating holy. Fr Casey reflects in the group on the implicit concept of eating holy in the Bible, and the challenges this has in rectory life, often in shared spaces, and often with delicious food that may be pushed upon us at the door. Today, decide to get rid of those things you intuitively know are unhealthy, in food and drink, and decide to allow God to guide you in making good decisions for the remainder of this challenge.

Day 3

Present!

Fr Ryan reflects on the several meanings of the word, especially as it involves being present for ministry. The irony is the stress of being present can sometimes lead us into unhealthy lifestyles which often involve a lack of presence and isolation. At their ordination priests respond to their call by the word "present." Today we apply this word to whatever we need to do to show up to this challenge.

Day 4

Ready, Set, GOALS!

Fr Casey: Simple goals, concrete goals, measurable goals. It’s easy to so say “I want to be healthy.” or even “I want to loose weight.” It’s another thing to say: “I am going to lose 10 pounds.” or “I am going to eliminate refined sugars from my diet.” Goals need to be concrete, measurable and attainable. We are all here because we want to be healthy. We all desire to be holy. We all want to serve the people of God well. These are good long-term goals, but what are the immediate goals that I can set TODAY to help me get where I want to go tomorrow? Today, I challenge us all to set clear, concrete at measurable goals for our nutrition, or exercise, and our weight loss. If you need help with that, reach out. Let us pray for each other. Eat clean. Be fit. Pray well

Day 5

Track! Track! Track!

Having lost almost 245lbs in three years, when I hear pro-athletes and weight loss experts say that weight loss (and by extension weight gain or maintenance) is achieved by having a calorie deficit (surplus, or balance) at the end of the day, I am in total agreement. The easiest thing to control with regard to calories is diet, which is why they will throw a statistic at you that says weight loss is 75-90% diet. Here, diet does not mean finding a particular diet like Atkins, paleo, or south beach, but is a more general term simply meaning "what we eat."

So, what's the first step towards being aware of our diet? If you want to stay consistent in weight loss, you have to be open, honest, and willing to track your food. You can do it the old fashioned way by keeping a handwritten food journal. But there's an app for that, and several, too! I use myfitnesspal, which has a social media component and the most extensive searchable data base. You are able to use a barcode scanner for even easier data entry.

Now it matters nothing if you don't pay attention to the portion or serving size of the food that you are logging. That nutritional information block on the label will become your best friend. Get yourself some measuring cups and spoons, or even a food scale, so that you can be accurate on your diary. (I sometimes brought them with me out to eat when I first started tracking).

We will get to the science of calories in/out in a later post, where we will find out just how many calories you should be eating in a day, a process that involves checking what is known as your basal metabolic rate, but for now become aware of what you eat in a day. Becoming aware is key, because it helps you make better choices throughout the day, and also it's the only way you will see lasting results.

Eat clean, be fit, pray well...and track, track, track!

Blessings,

Fr Ryan

Day 6

There are a million nutrition programs out there, it's important that each one of us finds the one that works for us. One caveat I would give is to avoid fads (anything that tells you you can eat all the X you want, or that has you near starve yourself on things like hot dogs and saltines). Find a way to help you eat less and to find healthy foods you like.

What is most important in this is that not just long term, but every day we go in with a plan. Without a game plan, it is so easy to be distracted and to fall off the horse. I recommend planning out your day, look at the times you would be tempted to eat junk or over eat and map out strategies...and then STICK TO THEM, regardless of the free advice you will get from others who find you are trying to be healthy.

Eat clean, be fit. pray well!

FrCJ

Day 7

Pray well!

Fr Ryan explains how prayer is integral to staying motivated, especially when someone is recovering from an addiction to food. Priests are often the last to rest on Sundays, and the temptation can be even greater to turn to food or declare a cheat day. The body does need rest from workouts, but we must all learn the ability to recharge not through substances but through prayer. Make it your simple prayer today: Lord, help me to eat clean, be fit, and pray well.

Day 8

Finding Your Motivation.

Dictonary.com defines motivation as:

“The reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way.”

I like it. I like it a lot. It works for well for our purposes. If you have not already, I invite you right now to consider: What are your reasons for accepting this challenge?

Today is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, a celebration not only of Christ made manifest, but of our identity in him revealed.

"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mk 1:11) are words that the Father spoke over us the day of our baptism and that he speaks over us every day as we seek to do his will and love his people.

Fat, thin, fit, unfit his love remains too deep for our minds to comprehend. He has given us SO much. The least we can do is give ourselves to him in the best way possible. Every year, every moment is so important in this vocation, I don’t want to miss out on it.

The people of God. They deserve happy, healthy and holy priests. They trust us with their souls. We need to be healthy for them.

I will end this were where most of these motivational challenges begin: YOU! You deserve to be the best version of yourself you deserve health and the benefits of feeling great. You deserve to be free from addiction and move into health. Jesus thinks you are worth it. He died for you, he called you to share in his priesthood. He loves you so much!

Those are some big ones, but what are the other reasons you have for moving into health? What’s going to keep you going on cold, lazy mornings? Call them to mind, write them down. Cling to them.

Eat clean. Be fit. Pray well.

In Christ,

Ft. Casey

Day 9

calories in/calories out

This post will be a little longer because it is the science of weight loss. But if you can grasp this concept and become willing, I truly believe that you will have the biggest chance of long term success. In the end weight is a number, so we must fight it with numbers!

Weight Maintenance, Loss, or gain is based on the simple idea of calories in/calories out!

Today's objective:

Find out how much your body needs for calories on a normal day.

This is known as your basal metabolic rate, and it is key to the science of weight loss. If we are to conquer emotional or binge eating during this challenge, we need to know how many calories our body burns in a day without any effort of our own.

This is best done at the doctor's office with a tool which measures your breath over a period of time. But if you do not have the ability to get this checked, a simple online calculator can estimate this for you. (Search basal metabolic rate calculator).

Knowing this number is important for two reasons: 1. It tells us the number of calories we must consume to maintain our weight, and 2. It allows us to adjust this number based on our diet and exercise so as to lose or gain weight.

Those of you concerned with maintenance need only shoot for maintaining this number. Those of you who want to lose weight need only subtract from this number by diet and exercise.

How do we track our calorie intake and output? Using a fitness app like myfitnesspal helps this. You can search and barcode scan from the largest social media database for the nutritional info of thousands of food choices. You also have the ability on this app to input your exercise routines. There is cross app capability, so that this can easily be done with an Apple Watch, a Fitbit or your favorite gps running app.

Some helpful things to know:

It is dangerous to consume too few calories. If you have a health condition, this can also complicate things. If you have any concerns, consult your doctor or nutritionist.

1 pound of fat = 3500 calories. If you want to lose 1 lb a week, which is a normal and healthy goal (most nutritionists advise 1-2lbs a week is healthiest), all you need to do is subtract from your basal metabolic rate just 500 calories a day by diet or exercise.

Generally the average diet is 2000 calories a day. Subtracting just 500 calories from this without any exercise should in theory mean that if you eat 1500 calories a day, and your basal metabolic rate is 2000, then you will lose a pound a week without picking up a dumbbell or hitting that treadmill.

Similarly, if you changed nothing in your diet, and burned 500 calories a day with exercise (easily done in an hour at the gym), you would experience the same results. Most people find that a combination of diet and exercise makes for the best results.

Building muscle helps your overall metabolism and makes your body and heart stronger and healthier. In this model, just a 1700 calorie diet with 300 calories burned in exercise a day will yield better results in the long run than just diet or exercise alone.

In theory, those of you who want to eat in excess, and take off the calories in the gym, can achieve success. Just know that the exchange for food calories and gym time can be eye opening. Just google it! Also, don't be upset if you go the route of strict exercise to curb the gain, because building muscle means water retention and a denser body mass. Overtraining can also lead to injury, and your body can only take so much. Eating too much salt can also contribute to water retention and normal fluctuations of body weight from day to day of 1-2 pounds. This is why diet is the main thing that we need to be concerned with, while exercise is only going to help the process of getting healthier and being fit.

With all of this said, figure out that basal metabolic rate, and then make any adjustments you need to your plan. Track, track, track!

Eat clean, be fit, pray well,

Fr Ryan

Day 10

Be Prepped!

Some of us may be familiar with the Boy Scout Motto “Be Prepared.” The idea is that a scout should be the kind of man who thinks ahead and is ready to face almost any circumstances. This is definitely a motto we should embrace as we move into health.

So in invite you to plan out the week. See what you have coming up and prepare yourself. Do you have a lunch meeting? Pull up the menu online, or call and see what options you have (most every restaurant can serve grilled chicken, rice and broccoli). Do have a bunch of dinner time activities? Are you in a regular time crunch all week? Then it's time to meal prep. The bottom line, don’t go into your day or week without a plan. Be prepared, be prepped!

OK I will offer some practical advice:

Meal prep isn’t rocket science, but can be intimidating if you haven’t cooked before. I will list for you here some equipment that made it easier for me:

• Scoops, cups and scale for portioning: As you portion out your foods for the week, it’s helpful to have it already measured for you.

• A Slow cooker (crock pot): This can be great for making a lot of “one pot meals” it does take a while to cook, but it needs little attention so you can throw everything into the cooker, go celebrate your weekend Masses and come back and portion out.

• Plastic containers/plastic bags: You gotta have something into which you will place your food once it’s portioned out.

• A rice cooker: Relatively cheap and really good for not just cooking rice or other grains (quinoa, barley, etc.) but also for steaming vegetables.

To prep for the week it’s simple: I recommend a trip to a store that sells things cheap in bulk (CosCo. Sam’s, B.J.’s , and the like). Pick a protein you like (it doesn’t just have to be chicken breasts, thought they are a go-to standard) any lean meat for protein is healthy I would frequently do pork tenderloin (Here’s a quick recipe from Rachel Ray: http://www.foodnetwork.com/…/balsamic-roast-pork-tenderloin…) , even lean cuts of red meat are not the devil, look up it’s nutritional value before you purchase. Grab your favorite veggies (I you hate veggies, try something new: here is a good recipe for roasted Brussels sprouts http://www.foodnetwork.com/…/roasted-brussels-sprouts-recip…, but rather than oil, try using some no-calorie cooking spray). Grab some grains, or a good starch (I’ve become a fan of quinoa http://www.foodnetwork.com/…/healthy-eating-all-about-quino…). Take the stuff home, and then on your prep day cook the food and then place the appropriate portions for one meal containers for the week (or next few days).

There are websites dedicated to this topic, but, of course feel free to reach out here for any help tips. If you have some of your own, feel free to comment!

Let's all pray for each other! Eat clean. Be it. Pray well!

Fr. Casey

Day 11

Accountability

Fr Ryan encourages the group to break out of denial and isolation by creating a team of support for accountability in the many goals of the challenge. These include being part of the support group, having someone to send a food diary to, getting a gym buddy or personal trainer, making appointments with doctor, dentist, nutritionist, or counselor, making sure you are current with a spiritual director or confessor, and reaching out to a trusted friend or brother priest who is able to see through any personal resistance to your goals. Don't go it alone, find strength in numbers. Be open and honest, and in this process of accountability learn to pay it forward to help others along the way!

Day 12

Let's Get A Physical.

Building off of Father Ryan's encouragement to break out of isolation, Fr. Casey offers the next concrete challenge: See your doctor.

Along with a trainer, a spiritual director, maybe a counselor, and an accountability partner, the doctor and / or nutritionist should be part of the team in your corner helping you be the healthier, happier you.

Visit your doctor. Tell her or him your plan, ask their advice. Polonius in Hamlet reminds us, "To thine ownself be true.". In our case, it's so important that we get to know ourselves and get a realistic picture of where we're at, so we can get a better map of where we're going.

For those who fear the lecture, I'm sure the doc will be thrilled to hear that you have made the decision to imporove your health. The doc will be more than willing to discuss a plan for you. My doctor has been a key player behind the scenes in my own story, as we've talked about different plans at different parts of my life, in different parts of my journey. And, yes look at the numbers both on the scale and in the blood work. You need to decide what's best for you, but don't do it blindly, and don't do it alone.

Today's challenge is simple. Pick up the phone and make an appointment to go see the doctor. As we've been saying all along, we can't do this alone, and we have to have a plan. Involve your doctor in your planning, trust me, you won't regret it.

Eat clean. Be fit. Pray well.

God bless,

Fr. Casey

Day 13

Cardio!

Men often shy away from Cardio machines in favor of bulking up in the free weight section of the gym. A lot of that has to do with social conditioning and our culture's hypermasculine obsession with muscle. Strength exercises are important for a fitness routine. But Fr Ryan suggests if you have a significant amount of weight to lose that you must also learn to build in a regular cardio routine. It will help you to burn fat, and to put you into that calorie deficit that will translate to more weight loss.

At first this might be daunting. It's why we have you check with your doctor. You may be suffering from heart or joint issues that may need some consideration when beginning strenuous fast heart rate exercise. Fr Ryan suggests starting out on a low impact machine like an elliptical or a bike. A personal trainer, or a simple target heart rate calculator can help you to find what a good heart rate zone to stay in will be, depending on your ability and goals.

As a spin instructor, Fr Ryan trains marathon and triathlon athletes. It didn't start out this way, though! He started barely breathing at the end of ten minutes on the lowest setting of an elliptical, while weighing in at 464lbs. He says that he truly believes anyone can do it if they just keep coming back.

Eat clean, be fit, pray well!

Day 14

Remember who you are!

Today Fr. Casey reflects on our identity in Christ.

I really think that as Christians, in general, we suffer form an identity crisis. Of all the doctrines, I think Catholic Christians struggle the most with the doctrine of divine sonship. We forget who we are at our very core, and when we loose that, we loose everything. We forget that above all, we are sons or daughters of God.

Today let us break free of names, of stereotypes, of labels, some that others have given us, and some that we have placed on ourselves, but, when the father sees us, he doesn’t say “Fat” or “Undisciplined” he says “Beloved Son”. He says “My Son, my servant whom I formed in the womb, through whom I will show glory.”

When we realize our Sonship, it is then that we can truly take seriously the task of honoring our bodies, which we so often neglect. So , let us, having broken free of labels, truly take to heart the theme of this challenge:

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.”

Eat clean. Be fit. Pray well.

Day 15

Stay motivated!

Identify hunger vs craving

This week we're focusing on topics that will help us to stay motivated.

We know what temptation is as priests. In the realm of food we call it a craving. If we want to stay motivated we have to learn to curb our negative response to craving. We can do this by using a part of our spiritual tradition that we call fasting. There might be some merit to fasting in the secular dieting world as well. For our purposes, though, we are going to attach a spiritual practice to what nutritionists call hunger tolerance. It's interesting that the readings today talk about fasting and feasting.

Fasting involves intentionally choosing something hard over something easy. Hunger tolerance is being able to endure the relatively small amount of discomfort you get from being hungry.

The purpose of this exercise is to help us endure cravings. There is a difference between real hunger and cravings. Real hunger is your body's reaction to not having the right amount of nutrition at a given moment. It is the body telling you, "I need something to eat soon, or I'm going to start to get the energy somewhere else" (i.e., your fat and muscle stores). A craving is an obsession of the mind over a particular food that for the moment will satisfy a desire, but might not necessarily fit what is nutritional, that is, good for your body. The difficult thing is when you have cravings while you are hungry.

Practicing hunger tolerance can help us differentiate between what is a craving and what is real hunger. As we progress in developing our food plans, we will need to decide what is the right amount of food at a given time, and practice abstaining from food between those times. It's those moments when we have cravings, or those periods around the times we should eat that we want to endure the relatively small amount of discomfort this may cause.

"Relative" is the key to this. Chances are the "pain" you feel when having a craving is very little relative to the pain you've endured from an injury, or the great emotional pain of losing something or someone whom you cherish. You may also think about the hunger of a third world orphan, and the small amount of "hunger" you feel now.

To practice hunger tolerance, choose one meal, either lunch or dinner (you need the energy of breakfast), and skip it. Make sure this meal you are skipping isn't around the time you exercise today. (If at any time you feel light headed, eat or drink something with carbs. Fruit or fruit juice is a good choice). This is not supposed to be a regular thing, it is only a practice in feeling what it is like to be hungry, and perhaps enduring some cravings along the way.

If again this is not advisable by your doctor because of some medical condition, please do not stray from your meal plan. But, if like most Catholics, you have been accustomed to a fast before, also take the time to attach the meaning of this challenge to the fast. We are presenting ourselves to the Lord. You might also want to sneak in a prayer for our country, for an end to all injustice and attacks against life.

Write down your experience of how the hunger went, and any craving you might have had. Recall the amount of difficulty or pain you felt, and perhaps compare it to other levels of difficulty or pain. Next, decide if you can go without those extras between meals. At the end of the challenge you may be tempted to go back to your old crazy way of eating. You will be able to ward that off because you know that even the pain of a little hunger is able to be overcome.

Eat clean, be fit, pray well!

-Fr Ryan

Day 16

Can't weight to get back on track!

Fr. Casey challenges us today not to fear the scale, even if we have fallen of the wagon:

I challenge you, if you have not tracked your weight, do so now! This way you will be able to celebrate your victories! Tell someone when you lose (you don’t have to give them your weight, but tell them if you are up, down, or have stayed the same) . It all starts with taking the initiative and getting on the scale.

Though weight is important, I would also want you to not be a slave to numbers. There will be some times when you do everything right, but the scale doesn’t move. For this reason, some may say that you shouldn’t weigh yourself every day when you first start. I do recommend that whether you weigh in daily or once a week, do it consistently. Wear the same thing, and do it at the same time. Most recommend right after your morning business. That’s what I do. But you may not own a scale (which I do recommend), so you may need to adjust to weigh in at the grocery store, or at the WW meetings, or a doctors, office whichever, just make sure you do it and do it consistently, at least once a week.

Also, moving into a healthy lifestyle is not just about losing pounds. Weight Watchers encourages people to also celebrate non-scale victories. Clothes fitting better (like my pants that were tight at Christmas actually getting big now), more energy, and “gains” at the gym are all example of this victories that are important to celebrate.

These victories are important to celebrate because they give us motivation to push through when things get difficult. For those of us in the challenge, today marks our halfway point. Many people have abandoned their New Year’s resolutions by this point. If you have fallen off the wagon, climb back on! Don’t give up! Get on the scale and start again. Life is full of setbacks and a journey into health is no exception!

Don’t wait. Weight. Now.

Eat clean! Be fit! Pray well!

Fr. Casey

Day 17

Do you mind?

Fr Ryan reflects on the practice of mindfulness:

The big secret to losing weight, above even strictly calories in and calories out, is knowing exactly what is going in and what you are doing for yourself. In a certain sense this means "really" knowing, or even contemplating the various components of your journey, from your food, to those steps, to your emotions, your thoughts, the way you handle stress, the reaction you have to a certain food or event.

Mindfulness involves a spiritual and emotional component that we need to master if we are going to summon the power to stay motivated. Come, Holy Spirit, help us be mindful!

Mindless eating, that is, eating without thinking, is a big culprit during the Holiday season (feast days), and characterizes what we call food grazing (eating throughout the day between meals, eating directly from food containers, going back to those leftovers late at night). Mindless eating is not caring about what is going in, letting your resolve go, deciding to just pack on the pounds.

Mindfulness is being fully present in the moment, not making any judgments about it, but fully experiencing what the moment is. It is not letting your mind wander, but bringing it back to the center of consciousness.

Mindful eating, then, is fully experiencing your food in the moment. Truly smelling, tasting, enjoying the food, rather than scarfing it down mindlessly. When you have portioned out your food, look at it, don't just pull food out of a bag and pop it in your mouth.

Slow down! You're probably eating too fast. The slower you eat something, the more you are likely to be mindful of what you are eating. Take pauses between bites. Drop your fork or spoon.

When you are done with your plate, wait 20 minutes. Your body needs about 15 minutes to register that it is full. Waiting is part of this mindfulness. It is getting your mind and body in sync. Even if your mind wants more, your body might be finished without you even knowing it.

So try this out today. Eat slowly. Experience your food. Try waiting before taking another portion. Be mindful.

Eat clean, be fit, pray well!

Day 18

Reframe the negative into a positive

Fr Ryan fills in for Fr Casey. Say a little prayer as both are a little under the weather. Sickness or other obstacles can get in the way of our goals sometimes. It does not mean we have to suddenly give up our whole program. Many have benefitted from the ideas behind cognitive behavioral therapy, which essentially boils down to the fact that before we act we have the power to think, even in our mindless binging. Getting in touch with the thought that goes behind our action can help curb or promote certain behaviors for our benefit.

The idea is to recognize sabotaging thoughts and reframe them into a positive statement which helps us stay motivated to reach our goal. Here's an example from Cognitive Behavioral Therapist Judith Beck:

Sabotaging Thought: I should be able to enjoy myself at special occasions.

�Response: Eating differently doesn’t mean I can’t enjoy other aspects of this occasion. But I have to face the fact that I may not get as much enjoyment from food as I used to. Since I’ll be faced with many special occasions in my lifetime, I have a choice: I can either eat whatever I want OR I can lose weight. But I can’t have it both ways.

http://www.beckdietsolution.com/daily-diet-solutions/ (Jan 11, 2017)

There are, of course, many sabotaging thoughts that we have. Learning to recognize those thoughts, and changing them to include the motivation for this challenge will help us to present ourselves better to the Lord on February 2nd.

Try writing out some of that "stinking thinking" that you have. Now try reframing it into a positive response that will get you back on track just for today.

Eat clean, be fit, pray well!

Day 19

Halt the Emotional Eating

Probably the number one thing people struggle with in their relationship with food is emotional eating. It just feels good to eat certain foods. It feels good to eat them (or drink those calories) when everything is going wrong. Many get into situations where stress and a high paced lifestyle can seem to force them into a never ending battle with the quick, the easy, and the tasty!

We know from our moral teaching that emotions are amoral, that is they are to be felt rather than to be judged as good or bad. Recognizing certain connections between certain emotions and the good or bad behaviors we have is key to breaking the downward spiral.

Remember this nifty acronym: H.A.L.T.

Halt means stop in German. When you are feeling a craving for that food, halt and recognize if you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired. These are typical "emotions" which can cause you to go to that treat or overeat unchecked or unfelt. Hungry can be considered an emotion if it is confused with craving. Hungry can also register that it's time to eat something which is on your food plan to continue to fuel your body.

Learning how to recognize emotions and deal with them for what they are is also a process that can uncover things which you must start to deal with by journaling, or in a conversation with a trusted friend, in spiritual direction or with a qualified counselor. Learning how not to eat your emotions and simply to feel and talk about them is the goal.

Eat clean, be fit, pray well,

Fr Ryan

Day 20

Push through the Pain

Many of us when we go through new exercises will have a bit of pain to work through. Our joints aren’t what they used to be. It’s important that we learn to move through the pain.

First of all, please talk to a doctor or a trainer about which exercises would be best for you.

Soreness and pain is common in all types of exercise, both strength training and cardiovascular exercise. Now, I must make this clear, I am no expert so please talk to a professional if you have a condition if which you are unsure. This being said, the pain of soreness, fatigue and ache is generally something that we must push through, and it will get better. Typically at the beginning, you should give your body a chance to recover after a good workout, this is why it’s not a bad idea in the beginning to alternate strength and cardio training, this will give your respective muscles time to recover and your body a chance to rest. In strength training, rest is just as important as lifting, as this is when your muscles rebuild after they have been torn down.

Push through the normal soreness, but don’t push through an injury. As you may know, I had an injury 10 days ago. I was very tempted just to “push through it”. Luckily, our school trainer set me straight before I hurt myself more. But even if we are injured or have a permanent condition, there are some things we can do. It’s up to you to find what works. Maybe it’s just walking for now. A 20 minute walk first thing in the morning before breakfast can have amazing results. If you have arthritis or joint pain, find a gym with a pool, there are all sorts of great aquatic exercises that can help you reach your goals. If your sick for a while and can’t work out, don’t give up either, just watch the diet and resolve to get back at it as soon as possible. The important thing this is that we preserve, push through and don’t give up!

“Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.” Heb 12:1-2

Eat clean. Be fit. Pray well.

Fr. Casey

Day 21

Relax!

Fr Ryan reflects on the need for healthy relaxation, particularly on the busy day of Sunday, which for the Church is a day of rest, but for priests may be filled with work and stress. He offers a list of helpful relaxation techniques that don't involve food:

1. Turning your phone to silent, airplane mode, or do not disturb

2. Taking a 20 minute walk

3. Returning to the recitation of the office if it's fallen out of habit (particularly on Sundays)

4. Putting on some relaxing music

5. Take a holy nap

6. Practice some form of meditative prayer (rosary, chaplet, lectio)

7. Watch an edifying movie, documentary, etc

8. Read something

Eat clean, be fit, pray well!

Day 22

Fr. Casey reflects on Body Image, Self-Esteem and Labels.

"Fat." "Lazy." "Clumsy". These are labels applied to someone who does not fit an ideal that the world has created. There is power in these labels. Sometimes, when we're overweight we even allow ourselves to receive derogatory nicknames for my friends. It's time to reject these labels, it's time to reject theses lies. With God's grace, we are not slaves to these titles. Make the decision right now to not be what people have labeled you! Right now, make the decision to be the best version of yourself and move into health. I will not be fat. I will not be lazy. I refuse to be names that people have called me. You have within you the power to beat these labels and break free, and it starts now!

Eat clean. Be fit. Pray well! You CAN do it!

Day 23

Stressed Out?

Fr Ryan reflects:

When I found myself at my heaviest weight three years ago I was definitely burnt out. Having endured a stressful first assignment, moving to another parish that needed a lot of tlc, and not having time for my own recovery, the stress took its toll. When my bishop sent me to rehab it was a much needed retreat from all the stress. Soon I learned that there would be all kinds of stress in rehab. Stress was part of life. I needed a new way of thinking about it.

I was referred to a very quirky psychologist who prescribed some relaxation techniques and one very interesting video to watch. It was a TED talk entitled "How to make stress your friend."

I began watching, thinking, this psychologist can't possibly know what kind of stress a priest is under! I was about to give up watching when she started talking about stress with regard to the body/mind's desire to make you social and courageous. It fit right into the mode of reaching out in accountability. It fit right into the concept of manly virtue. Watch this video, you will at least change your minds a little about fleeing from stress.

When we focus on healing, let's not be afraid to welcome this process, as stressful as it may be to go deeper. The last thing we want is to revert to stress eating or feeling isolated. There might be a ton of stress in our lives. We don't have to accept abuse, of course, but what we can accept is what the stress mechanism in our bodies is telling us to do: reach out of ourselves for strength.

The beautiful image of Jesus' yoke in Matthew can bring us some healing today:

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” (Mt 11:28-30)

Eat clean, be fit, pray well,

Fr Ryan

Day 24

Fr. Casey offers some thoughts on Intimidation and Bro Culture

Gyms can be scary places when you first walk into them. The clank of weights, the rythym of tredmills and bikes, the smell of rubber and sweat is a little overwhelming. The large number of just ... stuff makes it difficult to even know where to begin.

And then there are the bros. You know the bros. They live at every gym. A bro is typically in his 20's, is wearing a graphic tanktop, has on a backwards baseball cap and is usually double fisting a protien shake and a gallon of water. Bros travel in herds, they talk about the ladies and they talk abouy other bros. They apparently can bench 500 pounds, and they are intimidating as heck.

Bro culture can be so intimidating that a popular gym has gone to great lengths to keep out the bros. With rules banning string tanktops, to alarms that sound when you drop weights and reminders all ober that the gym is a "judgement free zone", they have done everything they can, but bros find thier way in even there. You can't escape the bros.

When it comes to bro culture and what has often been called "gymtimidation" the best advice I can give is the most reiterated command in scriptire, "Be not afraid." Gym culture in itself is something new to you, so do not be afriad to ask staff at your gym to show you how things work, and the correct form for exercises. Don't worry about "bothering" them. You pay for thier services. Many gyms offer orientations/fitness assments, which yes do often contain a salse pitch for personal training, but are also beneficial for you in setting up a fitness plan that works for you.

Part of getting over gymtimidation is education. I found internet research to be very useful in terms of exercises, in particular youtube videos. There are sone great channels out there.

If weight training is part of your fittness plan (and I highly recommend it), please, please, please start light! Do not let the bros make you think you need to pack on weight. Getting the proper form is way more important than how much you lift. Don't be afarid to start with with the bar, light dumbells, or a low setting on a machine. An injury, at best will set you back on your fitness goals, and could potentially be serious. Don't work without a spotter, feel free to ask the staff for help. This is why they are there. Don't be afriad! Remember the proverb "a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step". Don't allow intimidation to as an exuse to allow self-defeating attitudes to surface. You can do this!

Fear not the gym! Fear not the bros!

Eat clean. Be fit. Pray well.

Day 25

Chastity Fat and Hypersexualized Fitness

Fr Ryan offers some reflection on healing struggles with human sexuality as a means of further healing in health and fitness:

When I was in college I participated in a small group in my discernment program which eventually developed enough trust to talk about really deep issues like how to remain chaste in college. I used to joke that I had a nice layer of chastity fat to protect me.

We may be familiar with the Fr "What a Waste" mentality, that is a judgment that a priest would have made good marriage material and is wasted on the priesthood. I was living the Fr "what a waist," for many years, meaning my waist had grown to epic proportions.

We all know that fat can't protect you from sexual struggles. But some of us create a physical barrier as a reminder that we can't cross the line. Besides a nice gesture and an attempt to win Father's favor or approval as the best baker of this pie or these cookies, I think that's also why food shows up at the door of the rectory. Many people are also afraid to think of their priest as a sexual being. That's why the term Fr What a Waste exists. It's because the virile biological father image, and it can admit of some fat now, as dad bods are in, is wasted in their minds on someone who has vowed perpetual continence and celibacy, albeit for the sake of the kingdom.

We of course know that sexual struggles do not go away overnight, and some will remain to the day we die. These things all are things to present to the Lord, through the various counselors that we have. But all of these things do not have to cause us to lose our resolve to make better changes in our health and fitness.

A post like yesterday's was really important as we are in this process of healing. The bro culture at the gym has created a hypersexualized world in the fitness industry. It can be hard to go to gyms for that reason. If this is a problem for some of you, perhaps the best idea is finding exercise that works for you where you are not confronted with this. For those who are comfortable in the gym setting, this process of healing is an opportunity for ministry. You may develop friendships with other bros or gals at the gym that begin a positive road of spiritual health for them.

Today, invite God in to whatever this post has inspired in you.

Eat clean, be fit, pray well,

Fr Ryan

Day 26

Fr Ryan and Fr Casey met for the first time at the March for Life and reflected in a facebook live video about how the culture of life includes the care of priests’ lives.

Day 27

Fearless Moral Inventory

We have at our disposal a rich tradition of self reflection and bettering the moral life through various spiritual methods including making a nightly examination of conscience and preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. While this tradition is so healthy for us spiritually and psychologically, as we've mentioned before often the healthy things that we do fall by the wayside. In addiction the spiritual life is often the first thing to go and the last to come back.

Living an abundant life means being free to bring everything to the Lord that has shamed us in the past or that we are currently afraid to bring to him.

Making a fearless moral Inventory is the 4th step of 12 step programs. It's not simply a list of sins and amounts. It's becoming honest about our feelings and reactions to things that we have done or others have done to us. It's bringing together any writing exercises we have already done for this challenge: our unhealthy eating behaviors and binge foods, our attitudes towards working out, our sabotaging thinking. It's making a list of our resentments, our character defects, our deepest secrets and regrets.

We not only focus on the negative, though. If anything this process is about the positive mental attitude that we must have to continue living a recovered and healthy lifestyle. Might I suggest that this list also include our strengths, a list of the virtues that we want strengthened, and a list of the gifts that we wish to receive from the Lord. We will make this self presentation in a more authentic way when we know ourselves and see more clearly the way God sees us.

Be fearless. Hold nothing back! Feel free to share these things in confession or in a trusted appropriate setting. Or simply write these down and tear them up. The practice isn't a mental one, keeping this in the abstract is like saying you want to be healthy without a plan. Name it and claim it. God bless you in this process.

Eat clean, be fit, pray well!

Fr Ryan

Day 28

Fr. Casey reflects on

Forgiveness

Someone once told me that Oprah defined forgiveness as "The surrender of all hope that you can change the past. While there is so much that I dislike about Oprah's brand of "spirituality", I can't help but like this definition. I frequently use it in the confessional. Our Lord teaches us to forgive not only because it is the right thing to do in response to his mercy, but it is also the best thing to do in order to move forward in life.

There are many that we need to forgive. For many of us it can begin with our families who taught us poor eating habits, yet were surprised at our unhealthy appearance and see no correlation to threats of what would happen if we do not "clean our plates". For others it can be the merciless insults of peers we have had to endure from a young age. But for all of us there is one person that we absolutely need to forgive: You.

You must forgive yourself for the poor health choices you have made. You must forgive your self for allowing others to make health decisions for you. You must forgive yourself when you have setbacks on a diet and bad days. You must forgive your self in order to move on.

If you haven't figured it out, I'm kind of a nerd. I love scifi and fantasy. One author whose works I enjoy, Terry Goodkind, once wrote: "“There is magic in sincere forgiveness. Magic to heal. In forgiveness you grant, and more so in the forgiveness you receive.” All yourself to forgive others and yourself so that you can revive the healing the lord has for you.

There are many ways to do this. I offer you my method. I go before the Blessed Sacrament and say: "In the name of Jesus, I forgive N. for\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I list the things that person has done to hurt me. I always end with myself, and then surrender all the feeling of resentment and bitterness to the Lord. I have found such peace in my only life since I began tis practice. I pray it brings your peace as well.

Eat clean. Be fit. Pray Well.

Fr. Casey

Day 29

Breaking through

Fr Ryan reflects:

This week is all about finishing strong, as we approach Thursday's Feast of the Presentation. It's a little hard to believe how fast this month went. At the same time, for those of us who have kept our trees up 'til this feast day, as I have, we might be thinking it's time for this to be over. I want to encourage you to stay strong, to push through, and to double down on your efforts as we prepare to present ourselves as wholly acceptable to the Lord.

We've just come out of a week of healing. We hope that it's been a cathartic breakthrough moment as we finish this challenge. The concept of breaking through also extends to the practices we've been learning throughout the challenge. If we've lost the will to painstakingly track, consistently exercise and pray fervently, there were bound to be moments like this in our journey. There is a psychological component to this called perceived limitation.

Especially in the gym, it's easy to set a limit for yourself where your body is not truly fatigued or operating at its fullest potential. That's why people hire personal trainers to yell at them and push them past their perceived limits. To be sure there are limits, and we don't want to get injured, but there are also these moments where we could do more and begin to give up.

If we look back to our week calling us to stay motivated, we summon those good habits and positive phrases which turn around our negative thinking. We decide to break through perceived limits this week as we finish strong and present ourselves to the Lord with the best of our abilities.

Part of the Eucharistic prayer written by St Francis, which I used on my Ordination and First Mass card, sums this focus up beautifully: "Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, so that he who gives himself totally to you may receive you totally."

Eat clean, be fit, pray well!

Fr Ryan

Day 30

Plateau

We've talked a bit about setbacks here, the need to get up after we've fallen down. In my journey, what I find even more frustrating is a plateu. I'm in the misdt of one right now. Scale hasn't moved in almost two weeks. It's frustrating.

We really don't know what causes plateaus in weight-loss. Sometimes they can be caused by a seemingly innocent change in routine, like travel eating a meal late, skipping breakfast. This is anothet way that tracking can help. Go back and review your last few days and see if there's anything different.

If not, then I found that making a change can also move me from a plateu. Mix it up, try some new Foods, or try a new diet. Low carbs has got me pass plateaus before, for example. If you decide to change your diet, please remember the basic rule of calories in and calories out. Even if you're eating pure protein, if you exceed a caloric deficiency, you will not loose weight, trust me.

Making a switch to your exercise routine can also help you get past a plateau. If you've been working out in the afternoons try switching to the mornings. If you alternate between cardio and weight training, switch up your days. Try some new exercises. I find this advice is also useful for helping me get out of a rut.

Whatever you do don't give up don't lose hope and don't quit! I am convinced that the journey to help can also be a spiritual battle. Don't allow a plateau distract you or discourage you from becoming the best version of yourself. It's a plateu, not a fall. You've been through worse, you'll make it through this. Mix it up a bit, try new things and keep on trucking. But whatever you do continue to...

Eat clean, be fit and pray well!

Fr. Casey

Day 31

Present to the Future

Fr Ryan reflects on the day before our challenge end:

On day 3 of our challenge we talked about getting present, meaning showing up to this challenge day in and day out. Now with one day left of our challenge we start to think about the future in two senses.

First is how we want to memorialize tomorrow as we finish this Presentation Challenge. We have been so motivated to eat clean, be fit, and pray well. Tomorrow is a day to check in, to recall just how much God has moved in your life this month. What have been the successes? Have you made your goals? We want to see your progress and help facilitate your sharing tomorrow. The best thing we've heard along the way is this isn't necessarily about amount of weight loss or the amount you can bench, it's about being able to present ourselves before God and his Church in a new and more healthy way.

"Be eager to present yourself as acceptable to God, a workman who causes no disgrace, imparting the word of truth without deviation." -2 Tim 2:15

And the second sense of future is how we see Priestfit developing into an ongoing ministry. We have a Facebook page, support group, twitter and email. We are looking to develop a blog or website going forward that can provide more access to testimonies and resources. We are looking for more help, creating a cloud of witnesses that will inspire more of our brothers to begin this journey. This ministry is desperately needed in the Church. We see our role as twofold: 1. Support for priests, and 2. Advocacy in the Church, particularly throughout the institutional hierarchy. What will this take? We are asking if you are so inspired after tomorrow to get in contact with either Fr Casey or me.

We look forward to finishing this challenge strong. Eat clean, be fit, and pray well!

-Fr Ryan

Day 32

Today is the day! Happy Feast of the Presentation. We congratulate all of our 2017 Priestfit Presentation Challenge participants. This is the beginning of a movement for a healthier presbyterate!

Fr Ryan finished with a video message from the gym