

In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.



Today we enter the third week in Lenten tide, into the midpoint of our Lententide experience. In a homily given by St. Ambrose, he praises those who, through fasting, prayer and almsgiving continue down a path to obtain forgiveness for their sins. He also calls to task those who have so far neglected their duty. But after chiding them, he gives encouragement to those people who have so far enjoyed less than a stellar Lenten season. He tells them:

“Yet let them not mourn as if they had not hope, for he who could give back sight to the blind from birth (Jn. 9:1) can likewise change those who now are lukewarm and indifferent - into souls fervent and zealous in His service, if - with their whole heart – they desire to be converted unto Him.”

If we are truly Living the Gospel in our lives, starving sin from our souls and making a place for Our Savior, Jesus will make our journey passible. But we must realize, as we plod along in our quest, that this travel is truly challenging. Traveling around all the roadblocks that this world places in front of us is not only difficult but exhausting as well.

I’m sure that we all have good intentions to complete a good and holy Lent this year. By adding something, or denying ourselves something, we are seeking God. But, being human, we are perhaps also thinking that this 40-day deal sure is lasting a long time. In fact, if you don’t have this feeling, perhaps you need to look more closely at your intentions this Lent. Saint Maximus, Bishop and church Father, addressed this very topic when he said:

“We must accept with all reverence, brethren, the sacred days of Lent, and not repine because of the length of the season; for the longer our fasting, the greater the grounds of our forgiveness. For God, who is the physician of our souls, has instituted an appropriate time; sufficient for the just to make reparation, and for sinners to ask for mercy, the one praying for peace, the other imploring pardon.”

God has offered to us an appropriate time, during which we can make reparation and ask for mercy. It is His timeline, not ours, that we now must emulate, and if we have fallen behind in our quest of starving our sin from our very being, the *Physician Of Our Souls* wants us to catch up. But it does seem to be a long walk so far, doesn’t it? I am reminded of the familiar words we all have heard when traveling with a small child. “*Are we there yet?*” If we are sincere in our commitment to seek God in our lives, right about now we *all* should be having those same feelings. I must confess that I have added some things in my prayer life this Lent which, at any given day, seem overwhelming, taking much more time than I think I have. You see, the world

still pulls at me, pulls at all of us, trying to wrongly convince us that *what it offers us is more important than what we are offering God.*

But that's ok. In fact, I suggest that those who aren't experiencing these feelings have not yet begun their challenge to Seek God and live His Gospel. They are still packing for the trip, gathering those physical trappings that they think necessary. They have not yet departed on their spiritual journey because they are frightened, overwhelmed and fearful. Fearful of the travel. Of the time. The physical and emotional cost. Ultimately, these people are seemingly uncertain of the promise that God offers to all His seekers.

From time to time, we *all* are those questioning and doubtful people. We realize we should be hopeful, optimistic, more compassionate, but we have difficulty being so. Ultimately, we don't believe that it will work, so why even try? I am reminded of the words in the Lenten book which we shared five years ago:

“... doubt is the big reason we aren't saved. We just can't believe that there is a place beyond death. A new room doesn't seem to be a historical possibility. A land where everybody owns their piece seems a ridiculous seduction. So we decide that we are not crazy enough to leave the safety of our earthly home on behalf of a promised salvation.” (Calmly Plotting the Resurrection, p 15)

So we don't leave. We don't make that first important step. We don't seek. We stay home.

A man from whom I have frequently quoted is Brother Lawrence, who was a 17th century French monk of the Carmelite order. While in his youth, Herman, (his name at the time was Nicholas Herman) was in the military, and he relates a story of a simple observation which he made that changed his entire life.

“In the deep of winter, Herman looked at a barren tree, stripped of leaves and fruit, waiting silently and patiently for the sure hope of summer abundance. Gazing at the tree, Herman grasped for the first time the extravagance of God's grace and the unfailing sovereignty of divine providence. Like the tree, he himself was seemingly dead, but God had life waiting for him, and the turn of seasons would bring fullness. At that moment, he said, that leafless tree “first flashed in upon my soul the fact of God,” and a love for God that never after ceased to burn.”

Our long walk seeking God and following His Gospel continues, and our plan to fast sin from us lingers. (Like Brother Lawrence,) Some days we too may think that we are dead, but God is offering us everlasting life and we must journey on. As seekers of God, we continue our challenging and wonderful voyage. Not fearfully dreading the trip, but joyfully anticipating the destination.

(Rick, you may wish to print this for the bulletin)

A Lententide Consideration

*O how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?
Matthew 26:54*

I have frequently mentioned how difficult this 'faith' thing is here in the 21st century, what a challenge it is to live a Christian life among all of the pitfalls awaiting us, poised to separate us from Jesus and instead guide us to a more hedonistic sinful lifestyle.

"Oh, how much easier it would be for us if we only had that burning bush to look at, confirming God's existence and presence in our lives" I have said.

"How much easier it was for the apostles, the first followers of Jesus Christ who got to walk with Him, eat with Him, be present when He performed miracle after miracle, visually proving to all of them that He really is the 'real deal', the Messiah prophesied to us in the Old Testament." I have grumbled.

And yet, it occurs to me what a wonderful gift we have that was not provided to those men two thousand years ago. We have God's complete love letter, the wisdom and history of both the Old Testament and New Testament, written to and for us in our Holy Bible. We have read how often the disciples failed to see the connection between the passion of our Lord and the many scriptural passages foreshadowing it. But here today we should not make this mistake. We should comprehend, through the reflection of this historical book, that all sacred scripture is ultimately about God and the redemption that Jesus offers. Yet it is unlikely that we will truly and completely know God without reflection of the inspired written word about Him. It is with the gift of our Bible that we are given the opportunity to study His words adequately, to meditate on them frequently, to pray to Him daily. Let us seize the opportunity this Lententide, as we continue to purge sin from our souls, to open our Bible more so that the Bible may open us to our Savior.