



## OUR PERSONAL JOURNEY OF LENT

Lententide, 2020

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to offer some thoughts as we begin another Lenten season. It is my wish for you that this time be the most spiritually renewing of your life, and we will find ourselves together at the Feast of the Resurrection renewed and reborn.

In the first three centuries of the Christian experience, preparation for Easter lasted only one or two days. The first reference to Lent as a period of forty days is addressed in our first Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325 a.d.) In its early development, Lent became associated with baptism, as Easter was our great baptismal feast. However, Lent is not limited to those preparing for baptism. For many Catholics, this journey, from Ash Wednesday until Lent officially ends with the words proclaimed in the Exsultet: *“Rejoice O Heavenly Powers”*. It is a journey of spiritual and religious growth and rebirth from the state of sin into one pure and without transgression. The significance of the journey lies not in the number of days (40), but in our spiritual experience. Through the combination of prayerful contemplation and God’s grace in our lives, we develop from a flawed “old man” into the Christian resurrection of spiritual fulfillment.

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Romans 12:1*

Our reasonable service requires an action of both our body and our spiritual mind. Our responsibilities to God are conceived in our minds and carried out through our physical actions. Thus, one’s entire being must be presented by a deliberate act of will to the Almighty to accept His service.

What are the components of a spiritual Lenten journey? They should include the study of scripture, an increase in our prayer life, greater participation in the rituals and practices of our church, fasting, abstinence and penance. [See endnote] These things will provide the foundation for our sacred mission. Each of these components, tried and tested by years of tradition, move the weary spiritual traveler into the joys of personal regeneration at the arrival of Eastertide. Lent is known as a penitential season, one designated for self-examination and personal reflection. This reflection is not merely scrutinizing how we are living our lives, but also in contemplation of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ; His suffering and death for our sins. We should be reliving the example of Jesus in the desert for forty days: a time where He fasted and prayed. It is a time in which we should center our attention on conversion (*change*) and amendment (*improvement*) of our life. Through our own fasting and prayer, we should attempt to conform our lives to that of Jesus Christ. Each of our spiritual journeys will be different. Some pass through a life of sin into grace. Others will experience a less tumultuous, gentle turning toward the mystery of God through a greater understanding of Christ Jesus. Whatever the journey, it is a *pilgrimage of opportunity* for each of us to experience a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior.

Andrew of Crete said:

*“So it is ourselves that we must spread under Christ’s feet; not coats or lifeless branches or shoots of trees, matter which wastes away and delights the eye for only a few brief hours. But*

*we have clothed ourselves with Christ's grace, with the whole Christ –for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ- so let us spread ourselves like coats under his feet“.*

Whatever journey we choose to take this year; that of a minimal “nod to God” Lenten tide or a daily reflective journey with Him, we all must spread ourselves under the feet of Christ. We must be as the strewn palm branches of Jesus’ joyful reentry into Jerusalem, humble and receptive to the change He creates for each of us. Thomas a Kempis tells us:

*“There will always be many who love Christ’s heavenly kingdom, but few who will bear His cross...He finds many who will share his table, but few who will join Him in fasting. Many are eager to be happy with Him, few wish to suffer anything for Him. Many will follow him as far as the breaking of bread, but few will remain to drink from His passion.”*

Are we prepared to suffer a hunger pang or two, perhaps to humble ourselves through the sacrament of confession, to acknowledge our frailty and the meaningless nature of our lives without Jesus? How much are we willing to sacrifice for the one who sacrificed everything for us?

St. John of the Cross taught us that *“One who does not seek the cross of Jesus isn’t seeking the glory of Christ.”* Every Christian knows that Christ went the way of the cross for our sake. But it is not enough just to “know” this; each of us must *find* the cross which He laid upon, died upon, for us. His sacrifice is meaningless until we show that we are willing to die for Him too.

Soon, with the imposition of ashes on the first day of Lent, we will hear the words:

*“Remember O man, that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.”*

From the dust of the earth we were created, and after our span of life on earth we will depart from this world. But in our tenure here on earth we have been given every good and gracious gift; most especially to be made by God in His own image (Genesis 1:27). His love for us expressed by the overwhelming gift of being His children, *through* the blood of Adam and *by* the blood of Christ.

The journey of Lent is upon us. Through the free will which He has given us, we can embark on a journey which will culminate in the resurrection of our spiritual lives with Jesus, or... we can choose an easier path...away from Him...

Christ waits for all of us, and while our journey here on earth may be filled with the pitfalls of Judas, the reception into His glorious kingdom is worth every sacrifice, every fast, every prayer that we can offer. Let each of us have a good and faithful Lenten tide, so that we may eagerly anticipate His words:

*“Well done, thou good and faithful servant”.*

#### **Endnote:**

We distinguish between **abstinence**, in which meat, soup and gravies made with meat products are not used at all, and **fasting**, in which the quantity of food is reduced. In Lent, complete abstinence is to be observed on Ash Wednesday, on Fridays, and on Holy Saturday. Some individuals’ voluntary include all Wednesdays in Lent as an additional day of abstinence after the example of the early church. The Lenten days of fast are the weekdays of Lent, including Holy Saturday. On fast days only one full meal is allowed, along with two other small meals (meaning not more than a light breakfast and another half meal). Snacking between meals is discouraged, but liquids are always allowed. Where health, ability to work, the extremes of age (both young and old) would make the fast counterproductive, the discipline of the Church does not oblige, although Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are of stricter obligation. Those who cannot choose their food, such as soldiers and guests in a household should eat what is offered them. In addition to observing the Church’s discipline in regard to fasting and abstinence, many Christians voluntarily give up something for Lent as a matter of sacrifice and self-discipline. If you have any questions regarding this information, please ask Fr. Ponec.

#### **References:**

The Holy Bible

*Lent and Easter*, wisdom from Thomas Merton, Liguor Publishing

*Bread and Wine*, Readings for Lent and Easter, Orbis Books