

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Feb 18th 2015

Today begins the six week season of Lent. Ash Wednesday reminds us of the fragility of life and the fact that what we have now is not a permanent dwelling place (“Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return”). What might be understood Initially as an unwelcome reminder can be seen as a crucial and even joyous experience when we see how it fits into God’s plan for us.

Lent clearly provides us with the opportunity to look reflectively at ourselves from the perspective of our relationship with God. We discover a God who loves us enough to send His Son to be our savior. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus which we celebrate during Lent and particularly in Holy Week can become a reality in our lives. Lent’s challenge to that reflection on Christ and our faith in him can inform us of the way we interact with others, with our own “better selves” and the God who comes intimately close to us in the person of Jesus the Christ.

Pope Francis in his address preceding Lent last year invites us to make real for ourselves the fundamental fact of our faith: how God loves us as individuals and as communities of faith. We are all “in process” regarding the realization, acceptance and incorporation of that magnificent gift of God -- his love and his very self in the person of his son Jesus.

Francis cautions us of a central issue our world deals with: he refers to it as “global indifference,” the enemy of the engaged service that we are called to because we call ourselves faithful Christians. The Christian is the one who allows her/himself to be “clothed with goodness and mercy, and, like Christ, servants of God and others.” The Pope’s words are a wonderful challenge to each of us and as a faith community that makes real the desire to continue the work of Christ.

Often when we think of Lent we revert to a question that may not be the most important of questions: what shall I “give up” for Lent? We might need to see that good desire as secondary to a deeper realization. A way of formulating the deeper desire might be to ask how I can be more aligned with God’s goodness in the person of Jesus Christ; and how can I make that alignment to Christ a deep desire to imitate him, both externally (dealing with others in their needs) as well as interiorly (discovering more deeply the Christ into whom I was baptized).

Thus, we might better ask not what I need to give up (as good a discovery as that may be), but what does God call me to in my core as a faithful Christian? The answer most likely takes a lifetime to accomplish, but it makes all the difference in the world: I am called to serve the needs of my sisters and brothers. There is no “indifference” (as Francis speaks of it) found in looking out for those in need:

my sisters and brothers those in my home, city and world who call out to be heard and served. We, Faithful Christians and community of faith, hope and love are invited to serve generously those in our world in imitation of Christ, Lord and Brother who shows us the way to the Father.

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