

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Feb 17th 2018

Returning to the Sacrament of Reconciliation

I think these are good readings to start Lent. In Isaiah we are told to keep the Sabbath holy. Instead of following our own pursuits we should hold back, but delight in the Lord's Day. And that's sort of what Lent is all about – holding back our own pleasures and pursuits to delight in this season of the Lord. I didn't used to 'get' the giving up stuff for Lent. I thought it didn't mean anything in the long run if I didn't eat candy for six weeks, but I see it now more as a very small but symbolic way of sharing in Christ's suffering. And Lenten sacrifices can be life changing too. One year I gave up meat for Lent and I'm still a vegetarian – twenty years later.

In the first paragraph of the Isaiah reading, we get even more information. We are told later to keep the Sabbath holy and to hold back our own pursuits, but before that we are told to help others – to feed the hungry and help the poor. That may be the best way of giving up something for Lent – instead of just giving up the candy bar, use the money you would have spent on candy to help the poor and hungry.

I think that's what we lead into when we get to the Gospel then. The scribes and Pharisees rebuke Jesus for eating with the tax collectors and sinners. And by law they are right. At that time it was against the law of the land and the religion to be in the company of the sinners, but Jesus is following the letter of Isaiah by helping the hungry and the afflicted. He says, "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners." These are the people who are hungry for His word and he gives it. Those people who are already living good lives are not in desperate need, but those who are mired in sin need His help out. In Isaiah we are told that those who help those in need will themselves be repaid. Jesus is showing this by his example by helping those who most need His help.

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