

## From The Pastor

Lent can be a distraction. Anything that seeks to change our normal way of acting, thinking, or behaving can seem like a major disruption. Maybe that is part of the dynamic that makes Lent effective. Lent is not a normal time; it is a time that is to be set apart and different from the norm. How would we otherwise shake ourselves into a new awareness of the presence and the action of God in our lives?

Perhaps this is a good place to begin. How *is* God active and present in your life? How do you find yourself seeking to know and love the Lord in the rhythms of your daily life? It is difficult enough to make changes about long standing behaviors when we know where we are. If we are not aware or focused to where we are with the Lord, how can we seek to find a new and deeper place with him?

Lent is about prayer, fasting, and works of charity. The focus of these efforts is to renew our awareness of the love of God for us who are redeemed in Christ. What does it mean to you to be redeemed? How is your life different because you express faith and trust in Jesus as the Son of God? Really, think about this. You are redeemed. Your life has been purchased at a price, the suffering and death of Jesus, so that you can know the joy and peace of forgiveness, and divine acceptance. This redemption means that whatever failures or sins mark your life, you remain a child of God with a claim on heaven. This redemption means that you claim, in a personal way, the person of Jesus as the root and foundation of your existence. As such, your failure and sins become part of your moving forward in life as a believer in Christ.

This could be another way of repenting, or looking again at the call of the gospel. What are you learning from your sins? What are they teaching you about yourself and your relationship with others? If this exercise is going to be of any use, you must be honest with yourself. Let's face it, you are not perfect and neither am I. It does no good to console ourselves with the awareness that 'I am a good person. I don't do anything bad'. The road away from God is paved with such platitudes. Where is your love?

It is my personal conviction that the greatest sin never confessed is the lack of love. I might have the consolation that I have not committed any mortal sins, but I am not honest with myself if I believe I am completely loving. Notice that Jesus did not identify mortal or venial sins, but he spent his life calling us to love one another, as we have first been loved by God.

Lent is about recalling the life we received in baptism. We received the divine life, the life of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. Remember that the Holy Spirit is the love of God. You have the Holy Spirit; you have the love of God. How are you bearing fruit in the world with the love that is the inner sanctuary of your life?

The love that is ours in the Spirit is redeemed love. The original love given in creation was divided by our choice for sin through the deception of evil. Lent calls us to focus on the defeat of both sin and evil through the person of Jesus in his death and Resurrection. Now our love is redeemed, free to be shared and made fruitful by our self-giving. Still burdened by the reality of sin, we can be confident to return to the Lord for forgiveness and a new beginning. Whatever looks like a failure to us, is for God, a new opportunity to exercise mercy and give new life.

Lent is about giving away, as much as it is about giving up. Giving up is more about me; giving away is more about me in relationship with others. Both are important; each is better when both are together.

This year, more than ever, we have endless ways to give ourselves in meaningful love for others in need. Jesus loved the poor and showed special attention to those in trouble. The love of Jesus in us can serve in the same way. Perhaps giving up a favorite food will save some money that can be shared with the poor. When you pray, you can ask the Lord to show you your sins, then as an act of repentance, you could pray with love for the homeless or the troubled.

This weekend we are starting a new initiative for vocations. A friend generously provided us with a chalice and prayer cards for vocations. This is a national effort to make vocations an active awareness in family homes. Each week a new family signs up to take the chalice home. Placed in a prominent place, each day prayers are prayed for new vocations to the Priesthood and other vocations. It is very simple and very effective. Chalice and prayers are provided. What is needed is the desire and love for Jesus and the Church to pray for new ministers to serve its people. This new ministry is for everyone. The chalice is returned by the previous family at the end of the week, and given to a new family at the weekend Mass they attend. Please see the sign up in the back and share your love in Lent by praying for vocations.

This is a wonderful and powerful time of year. We exist to be loved by God, and in receiving that love, we become love for each other. Recall how loved you are, and shake loose new ways to share yourself.

Father John Esper