

prayer fasting LENT almsgiving

reflections on

2018
5th Sunday

Vocation in the context of Lent

Brother Alphonse LeBlanc, FSC

Under the former Latin rite, the Fifth Sunday of Lent was called Passion Sunday. Purple cloth covered the statues and crucifixes giving the church a rather sinister atmosphere. Dioceses of the United States may still permit the covering of statues and crucifixes.

Lent gets very serious at this time. Lenten resolutions might begin to weaken at this time. The time seems to drag. The reality of forty days of fasting sets in.

Personally, I am not very good at doing Lent, at least not as far as keeping a Lenten resolution of “giving up something.” In speaking with other people about Lent, many still seem to have a mentality learned in grade school about the meaning of Lent and what Catholics are expected to do during Lent. I really resent people asking “What are you giving up for Lent?” Why do they want to know? That is really a very personal question. They seem to be anxious to let others know what they’re “giving up.” Why is it so often chocolate and candy?

When I ask my classes, “Why do Catholics give up something for Lent?” The usual answers have to do with sacrifice. Of course the next question is- what is a sacrifice about?

The discussion might get around to recalling the suffering of Jesus to redeem us from sin. Some people act as though they have something to prove by making a sacrifice. Giving up something sometimes seems as though it is the fashionable thing to do. This little sacrifice is the proof that they are good Catholics, a proof that they “can take it.” Should the emphasis during Lent be about giving up something?

Lent is a penitential season, a time of penance, repentance. It begins with ashes and the admonition to repent and believe in the Gospel. Though Ash Wednesday is not a holy day of obligation, many Catholics regard it as such. The precept of the church is to go to confession during the Easter season.

Catholics should make reconciliation, a time to be reconciled with God, others and self. Penance is that sign of making up for sin in union with Jesus who suffered on the cross. The Church assigns a penance: fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and abstain from meat on Fridays.

The “giving up” is a more personal penance. But, that is not the only way to “turn from sin.” There are many positive things we can do to make up for sin.

An examination of our prayer life and acts of kindness and service can go far to make up for sin and make for a good Lent.

The Latin word for Lent, Quadragesimo, stresses the idea of 40 days. The English word for Lent is an old Germanic word for Springtime, hardly a gloomy concept. Easter is a word denoting fertility. The symbols for Easter are in tune with spring, eggs, baby animals, and flowers. The penitential color of purple during Lent may be the color of dead flesh, but it is also the color many spring flowers such as lilacs and irises.

Lent is a preparation for the celebration of the Easter mysteries. The Paschal mysteries climax in the Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Lent, our Springtime, has a happy ending.

Personally, Lent is wonderful time of reflection and renewal.

The Liturgy of Lent is full of paradoxes and deepening spirituality. The giving up of something can be a reflection of what should be essential in our lives as followers of Jesus. The time of Lent may be coming to an end soon.

Easter is the goal and the continuation of what Lent began.