

Lauding Lent

All right!!! Only another week until my favorite Church season - Lent! Am I out of my mind? Probably, but that's another issue. The truth is that Lent has received a lot of bad press. It's associated (and rightly so) with our Lord's forty days of fasting, temptation and meditation in the wilderness. But that does not mean doom and gloom. Christ's time in the wilderness was preparation for his great and courageous ministry and salvific acts. Lent is associated with the misery and suffering to come on Good Friday. But that does not mean darkness and despair. Christ's death was preparation for his glorious and joyous Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Lent is associated with penitence and penance. But that does not mean damnation and torment. It is our preparation for spiritual cleansing and salvation. We know that there is brilliant light at the end of the darkened tunnel of Lent.

Why should we value Lent? It's a time for study, reflection and meditation - an opportunity we should all seize to gain a deeper understanding of our Christian faith. It's a time for self-examination, which is a *sine qua non* in preparing for self-improvement.

The contemporary Church quite rightly emphasizes the positive, upbeat, joyous nature of Christianity. But we should not get so caught up in this that we ignore the other side of the coin - the penitential attitude resulting from an honest reflection upon the sinful aspect of the human condition. We should not linger in this dark corner of the human psyche and wallow in our sinfulness, but we should candidly acknowledge it rather than denying or ignoring its existence.

We run the risk of becoming so confident in Christ's expiation for our sins that we ignore our own transgressions rather than searching our souls to uncover our culpability. Why even bother reflecting upon my shortcomings if I know that our Lord has already made a complete satisfaction for any misdoings on my part? Such an attitude of evasion is neither spiritually healthy nor what God intended. If we acknowledge no sins to be corrected, spiritual amelioration and progress towards Christ's goals for us will not occur.

Just in case we consider ourselves without sin, our B.A.S. lists a few common peccadillos on p. 284 in the Ash Wednesday liturgy (no wonder most of us avoid this service like the plague) - *pride, hypocrisy, impatience, self-indulgence, exploitation of others, envy of those more fortunate than ourselves, excessive love of worldly goods, dishonesty in our work and daily life, negligence in worship, blindness to human need and suffering, indifference towards injustice, prejudice against those different from ourselves, waste and pollution of God's creation, not hearing God's call to serve, not forgiving others, ...and the list goes on. See any that might apply to you? Miserere!*

So you can see why we should learn to love Lent. It's a season that urges us to learn and expand our minds, to do an honest evaluation of our lives and our faults so that we may improve on our shortcomings, to meditate upon, and come to truly appreciate, the message and the sacrifice of our Lord. Lent tells us that there's work to be done, but that with God's help we can do it. What at first glance may appear to be negative and depressing is actually positive and life-affirming. Lent? Bring it on!

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