

2011 Lenten Reflections

A Reflection on the First Week of Lent

As the Christian world begins the journey of Lent for the year 2011, it might be a good time to consider our own spiritual journeys in relationship to this sacred liturgical season.

- How many Lents have I experienced?
- How has my view of Lent changed over my lifetime?
- How does my present view of Lent continue to promote growth in me with regard to my relationship with God and my relationships with others?

This first week of Lent may be an appropriate time to consider the meaning of the coming six weeks, or maybe, *re-consider* them from a new perspective.

Lent is intended to be a time of spiritual renewal for the church and its members. It is an opportunity to realize more deeply what it means to be a mature baptized Christian. Lent is about ongoing conversion – allowing God to break up our hardness of heart which prevents us from understanding and living according to God’s will as made evident in the life and example of Jesus. As we open ourselves to his message, Jesus is at work transforming us.

Lent has long been considered a “penitential” season, marked by prayer, fasting and almsgiving. But a caution here, true penance is marked by wholeness, integration and balance, attempting to keep mind and heart attuned to God’s will.

Such considerations prompted Thomas Merton to write from a biblical spirituality perspective, that Christian self-denial is “...a humble realistic acceptance of everyday life and of God’s will, in a spirit of obedience and freedom.” (from *Seasons of Celebration*)

In this context, the function of any self denial we may undertake is not about deprivation of things that give us pleasure. It is not to pay a grudging debt to a demanding God who expects such sacrifice because we have sinned. Rather, true self denial is focused on the clarification of God’s will in our regard, and the integration of our whole selves in God’s service.

From this perspective then, Lent 2011 can become for us a season of growth, renewal and healing in union with Jesus and our brothers and sisters in the human community.

As we move into this important season of the church, ask yourself: What transformation does God desire for me this Lent?