

## OUR LENTEN JOURNEY TRAVELLING WITH JESUS

“Lent is not about giving up our adult candy or immersing ourselves in pain. Lent is about being honest with ourselves, changing what needs to change in our lives, making our world a better place and growing into the light.” (Dave Hoefler)

Lent is a season that the Church has set aside, going back hundreds of years, to focus on the enormity of Jesus’ sacrifice. For Christians, Ash Wednesday signals the beginning of this Lenten season – the season we associate with ‘penance’. For many people, Lent is associated with certain kinds of sacrifice – giving up something one enjoys for the season, abstaining from meat on Fridays and fasting on prescribed days and so on.

These forms of voluntary self-denial have served the Christian faithful well over the centuries as a set of practices which help take us out of our daily routines and ordinary life in order to renew ourselves in living out the Gospel. But there is a certain danger behind that definition! If practicing penance is all that Lent is primarily about, it merely trivializes its true meaning. It reduces spiritual life to some kind of balancing act. Maybe we think that by doing so many penances in lieu of our human sinfulness, not to mention the ongoing pandemic restrictions – voila we have then cleared our debts!

Unfortunately, the Lenten season can become filled with overly scrupulous goals. Yet, we don’t need to try and change everything about our relationship with God in a mere forty days. In focusing on prayer and fasting to such an extreme we may possibly forget the purpose of doing so could become a stumbling block to attaining our spiritual goals. No, Lent is a time for us to focus on Christ and his sacrifice, His immense love for us and on uniting ourselves with Him more deeply.

Perhaps, this Lent, we can take a different approach. We can try to be more mindful of how Jesus travelled His final stage of life towards His death on the Cross. For us too, Lent is a journey from life to death, from light to darkness. And yet, conversely, it is also a journey from death to life, from darkness to light! The Lenten Gospels share many stories of Jesus’ encounters with those who have lost all hope, yet come to find their lives transformed as they accept the message and healings of Jesus, their Saviour.

Traditionally, Lent has always been not only a time of prayer, fasting and repentance, but also as a special time set aside from the busyness of our lives to enable us to come closer to God. A time of preparing for Easter similarly as Advent helps us prepare for Christmas. I know it helps refocus this special season for me. I no longer merely regard the practice of ‘giving up’ something as part of an old tradition, but also as an opportunity to spend more time in the silence and presence of God, of sharing the joy and anticipation of the triumph of Jesus’ Resurrection at Easter.

Our Lenten Journey

And most importantly, this Lent is, more than ever, about taking each day one at a time. As Pope Francis reminds us in his 2018 apostolic exhortation, "Rejoice and Be Glad," our pursuit of Christian holiness requires that we embrace perseverance, patience and humility. God understands the continuing life challenges we face this coming Lent, and invites us to experience divine love and mercy as He accompanies us in our ongoing struggles.

From past experiences, I know it won't be easy to make/take the time but here in lies the lesson: We need to realize that Lent is the time to 'give up' making excuses. The time to stop saying 'No, I can't do it!' And most of all, to realize that Lent is the time for us to endeavor to live our lives more fully, for life is a gift from God that we should embrace to the fullest.

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