

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

3rd Sunday of Lent | For Sunday, March 15, 2020

Remember and Be Transformed

Written by Br. Silas Henderson, SDS

Exodus 17:3-7

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

John 4:5-42



"Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted."—John 6:11

Did you know that our word "Lent" comes from the Old-English word for "springtime?" This gives us a wonderful insight into what the days between Ash Wednesday and Holy Thursday are all about: a season when faith and the virtues of the Christian life grow and flower within our hearts and souls. But, as Ash Wednesday approaches each year, one of the first questions we Catholics ask is, "What should I give up for Lent?" And it's a fair question because, as we know, penance is a *part* of Lent.

So, how do you or your family and friends answer this question? Do you give up social media? Television? Chocolate, or another favorite food? Soft drinks, coffee, or alcohol? While it's true that taking a break from any of those can be good for us, we also have to ask ourselves if these sacrifices are really helping us to grow in our lives as Christians. Lent isn't only about doing penance. We have to think of other opportunities for "good works" during the Lenten Season.

The traditional works of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting help us focus our attention on what is most important in life. If we can think of our Lenten penance as a "good work" to be taken on and shift our focus away from what we "give up," we will find that our Lenten prayer and devotions will be richer and more fruitful. As Henri Nouwen has reminded us: "Lent is a time of returning to God... a time of refocusing, of re-entering the place of truth, of reclaiming our true identity."

But, there's more at stake because, as we reflect on all of this, we have to remember that Lent isn't an end in itself. *The purpose of the season of Lent is to help us prepare for Easter when we will renew our baptismal commitment.*

In the first centuries after Jesus, those individuals who wanted to become Christians spent months and even years preparing for Baptism, which almost always took place in a special ceremony on the night before Easter. That night was anticipated by a time of prayer and fasting so that the soon-to-be Christians would be as ready as they could be to receive the gifts of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. This is the origin of Lent. (Our contemporary process of the [Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults](#) (RCIA) is built around this model of initiation.) Those Christians who were already baptized would also pray and fast as they prepared to renew their own commitment to Christ by renewing their baptismal promises on Easter Sunday.

If we keep the themes of Baptism and discipleship in mind as we consider the value of fasting and sacrifice, we quickly realize that fasting isn't about just giving up something we enjoy. After all, there isn't any real spiritual value in giving up chocolate or soft drinks. The point of fasting is that we give up something that we enjoy to help us pay better attention to our deeper hungers and desires.

Each one of us lives with needs—physical needs and the need for love, security, and community—that we often bury or try to hide by filling our lives with “stuff” and relationships that can never really make us happy or give us peace. And so, Lenten fasting means that we set aside those things with which we self-medicate so that we can be free to recognize what our real hungers and desires are—including our desire for God.

Only God can truly satisfy the deepest desires and needs of our hearts.

These ideas of baptismal renewal and our deepest hungers are at the heart of our readings on this 3rd Sunday of Lent. As we hear the story of the woman at the well, we are being invited to remember our own Baptism and to think about how our lives have been—and are being—transformed by the Living Water of Jesus. Our prayer, fasting, and works of charity and mercy should be helping us become more aware of how the grace of Baptism is at work within us.

In the end, every Easter Sunday we are given an opportunity to renew the promises of our Baptism. This means rededicating ourselves to live as Christians in the world, and to continuing the mission of Jesus, especially for the poor and those in need. The 40 days of Lent are a time for us to get back to the basics of who we are as followers of Jesus.

Br. Silas Henderson, SDS

PRAYER

O God, author of every mercy
and of all goodness,
who in fasting, prayer, and almsgiving
have shown us a remedy for sin,
look graciously on this confession
of our lowliness,
that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,
may always be lifted up by your mercy.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the
unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

(from the Roman Missal)