

# 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Feb. 13/14, 2021 – Pre-Lent Reflection

This weekend when love is in the air and we ask those special someones in our lives to “Be My Valentine”, it is so fitting that we also stand at the edge of the season in the Church year that calls us back to fall in love all over again with God.

Lent, which begins this Wednesday in the ashes of our failures to love as we should, is a time of 40 days ... 40 days of journeying into the desert of our selfishness so that we might be purified and readied for the promise of a new land, a new life lived in God’s love, as the ancient Hebrews wandered in the desert before entering the new land flowing with milk and honey that God had promised them when He led them out of Egypt.

Lent is a springtime of 40 days of soul-searching, getting ready to respond to the Lord’s call to follow Him as the prophet and messenger of His gospel of love and mercy, just as Elijah did with his fast of 40 days to prepare to speak in the name of the Lord to a people who had forgotten all about the Lord, a people who didn’t want to listen.

Lent is a battleground of 40 days when we confront our demons, bid them begone and turn back to our God, just as Our Lord Jesus did in the 40 days of prayer and fasting and fighting temptation as He battled with Satan in the wilderness.

In the bible, numbers are often important and carry great meaning ... 40, a length of time for purification and getting ready for mission; 12, a number of fullness, the number of the 12 Tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles of Jesus; 10, a number of completeness and the number of the Commandments given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai; 3, a number of mystery and waiting, the number of the Persons in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the number of days the reluctant prophet Jonah spent in the belly of the whale; the number of persons seen on the Mount of Transfiguration ... Jesus, Moses, and Elijah; 3, the number of denials Peter made in claiming not to know Jesus; 3, the hours Jesus hung on the cross;

3, the days Jesus lay in the death and darkness of the tomb; 3, the number of the greatest virtues: faith, hope, and love.

Lent rests upon 3 lynchpins: Prayer; Fasting; and Almsgiving.

Lent calls us to set aside time and quiet to reconnect with God, to pray. The apostles cried out for Jesus to teach them to pray and so might we as well. I have a suggestion for those of us who might not be the best prayers and who have trouble quieting our restless spirits. During this year of the pandemic, many of us have gone stir-crazy with isolation and quarantine. Just to get out of the house, many have taken to going on long walks. Why not during lent put a rosary in your pocket, where no one will see, and pray that prayer as you walk a few times a week?

“When you pray ... go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

Lent calls us to fast, to trim the excesses out of our lives to get to our fighting weight so that we might be able to battle our personal demons. For the last year, we've been fasting from gatherings with loved ones, celebrating milestones, visiting one another, social activities ... why should we bother to deny ourselves more when we've already sacrificed so much? May I suggest a sacrifice of some little creature comfort, maybe give some of those special treats we've been hoarding to the food drive of our St. Vincent de Paul Society; maybe as a couple or family, we could gather once a week for a simple sacrificial meal of bread and soup to remind of our solidarity with the poor and the hungry.

“When you fast, you should not appear to be fasting except to your Father who is hidden and your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.”

Lent calls us to be generous, to give alms to the poor ... hopefully, our other little material sacrifices will free up some dollars to put in our Rice Bowls or donate to our St. Vincent de Paul Society to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked.

“When you give alms ... keep your almsgiving secret and your Father who sees in secret will repay you”

As we prepare to enter into the tri-fold disciplines of Lent this week, I leave you with a poem of Kitty O'Meara called "In the Time of Pandemic" ... that could easily be called "Lent in the Time of Pandemic"

And the people stayed home.

And they listened, and read books, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still.

And they listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently.

And the people healed.

And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.