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This past Sunday I asked one of the server's if he had decided on what he was going to give up for Lent. He had. He was all ready. His Lenten resolution was in place and, even though he recognized it was going to be a challenge, he was prepared to engage in the Lenten discipline.

It seems like a natural thing for us to do: to ask others about what they are going to do for Lent. It bolsters our sense of solidarity when we are assured that we are not the only ones going through something. And Lent is something we ought to feel free to go through together and to talk about.

Today's gospel, however, is filled with admonitions to hiddenness and secrecy.

Jesus encourages us to give alms in such a manner that "your almsgiving may be secret."

Regarding prayer he says "go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret."

And when it comes to fasting we are told that we should not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden.

Even though we enter into Lent as a community, there is something intensely personal about it; something between us and God alone.

In my pre-Lenten reflection about what would be a good thing to give up and about what would be a good thing to take on, I was confronted with the fact that my Lenten discipline will cost me. If I take Lent seriously, and the invitation that Lent provides seriously, there will be a

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price to pay.

Unfortunately, that can lead us to want some sort of compensation—in the form of recognition, perhaps, of the sacrifices we have taken on.

And if that should happen, we run the risk of missing out on what was meant to happen.

If we honor Jesus' instruction to maintain secrecy and hiddenness in our Lenten practices then we preserve the possibility that, in that secret place and in that hiddenness, we will discover God acting, helping, fostering our growth. And that is the main thing.

Lent is not about successfully fulfilling our Lenten resolution. It goes much deeper than that. It's not about holding out for forty days from what we normally engage in, only to take it up on Easter Sunday. Those exercises of restraint are meant to assist us in the main task, which is conversion of heart, and that happens within; where the contact between us and God occurs

If we honor the mystery of that encounter, I think we will be less inclined, at the end of Lent, to report on how we did; whether we were successful in carrying out our Lenten resolution, and more inclined to proclaim what God has done for us. It won't be about us anymore, it will be about God.

So today, as we take the cross of ashes on our forehead, let's commit ourselves to a Lenten discipline which is centered around remembering that this season is about what God is doing in the secret places of our lives and give ourselves over to him, so that when it comes time

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to celebrate the Easter sacraments we will have much cause to glorify what he has done for us, and more willing to carry that growth and conversion into the future.