

First Sunday of Lent – Year B (2021)

If you've ever been to a **renewal of vows** for a married couple, you know that it is a beautiful thing.

To see two people, get up in front of their family and friends and **re-commit themselves to one another** is truly a touching moment, one that can fill our hearts with real hope— hope in our own relationships, hope in love and fidelity, hope in kindness and compassion, hope in steadfastness and perseverance, **hope that the best things in life don't need to fade away.**

In some ways, this holy season of Lent is a **kind of renewal of vows**, an opportunity to **re-commit ourselves** to a life of **faithfulness**, re-commit ourselves to a life of **discipleship**, re-commit ourselves to a **God who has loved us first** (and who has never stopped loving us).

But we don't always see it that way, do we? Sometimes we see this season of Lent as only about "**giving something up**" — testing ourselves to see if we can "do it".

- **Abiding by a few additional Church rules.**
- **Practicing a couple of extra devotions.**
- **Reading a little of the Bible.**
- **Sending a few extra dollars to charity.**

In other words, sometimes we focus so much on these **externals** that we forget that these things aren't ends in themselves, but rather are meant to **shape, change** and **transform** us into more loving, caring, merciful, and generous people.

Put another way, if this holy season is only about these external things, only about enjoying the “novelty” of the season, we are likely to find ourselves **returning** from our forty days in the desert the **exact same as when we entered it**— somewhat **unequipped** and somewhat **reluctant** and maybe even a little bit **afraid** to follow Jesus wherever he leads.

If we are not careful, if we are not attentive, we might find ourselves in a relationship in which we **take certain things for granted**, a relationship in which we’ve **kind of stopped trying** to be the best version of ourselves— the best **partner God can count on to carry out his mission**.

And like a marriage, this covenant relationship with our God is not an easy one. It demands a lot. Truthfully, it demands our whole selves.

Yet, one thing is certain, we never have to wonder if **God will somehow want out of the covenant**, if God will somehow not be fully **committed to us**, that God will not **love us** in the complete way we need him to.

And so, let us strive to “do Lent right”. Let us not fall into the trap of making this holy season into some sort of contest or challenge to see if, this time, “we can do it”.

Rather let’s see Lent as a sacred opportunity—an opportunity to love God a little more deeply, live our lives a little more faithfully, and carry out the work of God a little more humbly.