



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

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Reaching out to others as part of our traditional Lenten practices

In my second year at the University of Nebraska (bow your head), I returned to the practice of my Catholic Faith. As my faith practice grew stronger, so did the feeling that God was calling me to the priesthood.

And so, at the end of the fall semester I announced to the pastor, who was also the diocesan vocation director, that I wanted to go to the seminary. His response still rings in my ears: “I wouldn’t take you if you were the last man on earth!”

He pointed out that, although I attended every study group offered, as well as daily Mass, and was often seen praying in church, I consistently refused to serve, wherever, whomever, even at the altar!

He explained that for the followers of Jesus, and especially for priests, living other-centered, going out to others, being with them, and serving their needs are the marks of true learning of the Gospel and of true devotion.

Honestly, I wanted to slug him too (maybe I need help for my violent tendencies). But after cooling off, and over time, I accepted the truth of his words, and changed my ways, and was accepted in the seminary the next fall.

This exchange came to mind as I was reflecting on the holy season of Lent, more particularly on the traditional Lenten practices of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

These practices, if they are to be authentic, are guided by the same dynamic as Christian discipleship - other-centered, going out of self to another, for example:

- Prayer and worship are aimed at entering into communion with God, to be possessed by God, to be transformed by God into the Divine Likeness;
- Fasting is designed to deprive ourselves of comfort, but is only complete when it serves to comfort those who are deprived of what is needed to live in dignity;

- And almsgiving, that is, giving to the poor, by its nature serves people in need, regardless of who the person is, or whether that person is deserving, asks nicely, knows the cost to me, or is grateful – none of that matters.

Our Lenten program culminates in the Easter celebration of the new life in Christ that we received at Baptism, renewing and reinvigorating that life, so that it seasons everything we think, say, and do.

And what is that new, baptized life but living other-centered, going out to others, being with them, and serving their needs, just like Jesus, who taught by word and example, washing feet, laying down his life, pouring out his blood, and manifesting the resurrection.

God have mercy on us, and help us to be true disciples.

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