

Well, I think it's fair to say the groundhog was right.

He didn't see his shadow - which means an early Spring -  
and signs of Spring are everywhere.

I'm really glad we didn't have any snowstorms (fingers crossed)  
because we saved thousands of dollars on snow removal.

Maybe God knew how tight our church budget is!

I feel a little conflicted though, because I always look forward to  
a few snow days to clear the clutter off of my desk.

### **SCREEN: cluttered desk photo**

Clutter like this.

Alright, this isn't my desk.

Mine has never gotten this bad, but the clutter can pile up.

Anybody else have a desk or office or room like this?

When it starts to look like this, it's time for Spring Cleaning.

### **SCREEN: Spring Cleaning main screen**

Today we are beginning our Lenten message series titled, Spring Cleaning.

Now why did we pick that title for these next forty days?

Well, Spring is a time when many people decide to tackle the clutter,  
to toss what's useless or just getting in the way, so they can be better organized.

The word 'Lent' comes from an Old English word which means 'Spring'.

For Catholics, Lent is a time to do some spiritual Spring cleaning -  
to clear out whatever is cluttering up our souls.

Like bad habits or attitudes or practices.

We are being told to toss what's useless or harmful or  
getting in the way of our faith.

This year we are focusing on the Lenten call to

*'return to God with our whole hearts'* so we can be more like Jesus:

to act as he acted, and to make choices the way he made choices.

The readings today told us what happens when people don't choose to follow God

and Jesus in the Gospel shows us what making the right choice looks like.

**SCREEN: blank red background**

So our first reading today takes us back to the very beginning of the bible - to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

It's the very first bible story most of us learned as kids.

Now, think about it, God gave Adam and Eve everything they could possibly need or want. Everything.

He breathed life into them,

planted a garden filled with trees of every kind imaginable,

placed them in this paradise and their new home even came with an instruction manual (so to speak).

But a pretty simple manual with just one instruction:

*don't eat from the tree in the middle of the garden.*

Sounds like a pretty good arrangement to me.

*So, God, I can eat from every other tree, just not this one?*

*Right! Okay.*

God who created Adam and Eve knew everything about them.

God knew how to keep them safe and happy and close to him.

But he also gave them free will.

That's why he put the tree there - so they had a choice, so they could choose him with their whole hearts.

He gave them the ability to choose right from wrong; to choose to follow God's will or not.

And unfortunately, we know the rest of the story.

The serpent tricked them, they ate of the one tree God told them not to eat from and everything changed.

What they were saying with their choice to disobey was,

*"God, we don't trust you to know what's best for us. We know better."*

**SCREEN: Jesus in the wilderness**

In the Gospel, we see what it looks like to choose God.

Every Lent begins with us hearing about Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness.

This was at the very start of his ministry.

Why did he go there?

The simplest answer is, to prepare for the work ahead.

He needed time to pray, to get his priorities in order.

He wouldn't have used this term, but he needed to clear out the clutter so he could focus entirely on the mission God called him to.

Now there are a few important things I'd like to mention about his trip.

The first is that we were told that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted.

Think about that.

The Spirit led him there to be tempted.

And second, Jesus took nothing with him for his long stay in the wilderness!

No food, no change of clothes, no camping gear.

Jesus was trusting in God to provide for his needs.

He was choosing God's will and God's plan.

Each time the devil presented Jesus with a temptation

- for food, for power, for glory and honor -

he was really asking Jesus to rely on himself and not trust God.

But because Jesus had a close, intimate relationship with his heavenly Father, and a deep knowledge of scripture, he had the spiritual tools to resist.

That's how Jesus could resist temptation and choose to trust in God.

So this wasn't blind trust, it was based on a life of lived experience.

And it's why he could say this to Satan:

**SCREEN: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.**

Jesus chose God over the temptations of Satan.

And because he did, it made all the difference for us.

Think back to our message series that began this year titled, 20/20 Vision.

We said that temptation is when something we know to be wrong is made to look harmless, desirable or even good.

Isn't that what Adam and Eve struggled with?

The forbidden fruit appeared to be good, pleasing and desirable.

For so many people nowadays, one of the greatest temptations is making life all about the wrong things.

Things like one's career or schooling or possessions or power or pleasure.

And none of those are bad things; they are great things.

But they have to be balanced with the greatest thing in life which is choosing to follow God; making God and faith the center of one's life.

So the challenge for you this Lent is to clear out the clutter, whatever is weighing you down or making it hard to choose God and follow Jesus.

Maybe for you it is material clutter that has to go

- needing to always have the latest, the newest, the best and only ending up deep in debt and unfulfilled.

Maybe it's emotional or mental clutter from past hurts or difficulties or struggles.

Maybe your schedule has become your clutter - running nonstop from sun up to midnight without a second to even breathe, let alone pray or think about God's calling.

These are the things you may be struggling with.

And the temptation is to not face them, which means they just take over.

As I was writing this message, I asked a few people how they deal with material clutter when it gets really bad....like in the desk photo I showed earlier.

One person said, *"I just try to neaten it as best I can.*

*I straighten the piles, put things in drawers, stick it away onto shelves."*

And I said, *'Oh, so you don't really deal with it you just hide it.*

*Out of sight, out of mind, right?'*

But another person said this, *'When I have a really cluttered room,*

*I start by taking everything out of the room....everything.*

*And before I put something back in I ask, do I need this?*

*Does it belong somewhere else, is it broken and can it be fixed or should it be tossed.'*

This is exactly the choice facing us in Lent with the spiritual Spring Cleaning God asks of us.

We can avoid the real problems in our lives -  
refuse to face what needs to change -

**OR** we can do the spiritual deep cleaning God is asking.

And here's how you do true Spring Cleaning:

you hold everything up to the light -

every attitude, every habit, all the ways of relating to God & others -

and ask, *'Should this stay or go? Do I need this? Can it be fixed?'*

It is really easy to just push the negative down, to ignore what needs to change.

The harder approach is difficult and challenging; it is the road less traveled.

Without that, Lent is merely superficial window dressing.

Now let me ask, what are you doing for Lent?

Avoid the temptation to go through these 40 days like you have in the past,  
believing that some minor efforts will suffice.

Planning to give up something you enjoy only to return to it at Easter.

That's the spiritual window dressing I referred to.

What God and the Church desires is what Jesus did for his

40 days in the wilderness -the road less traveled.

It's choosing God and making God first in our lives.

It's embracing real change, true conversion - what the Greeks call metanoia.

It's a total 180, a complete turning towards God with one's whole heart.

So this isn't just shoving things in drawers or getting it out of sight,  
but getting rid of it completely.

What will help you do that this Lent?

All our spiritual disciplines and practices help us change and grow.

I think the best place to start is asking God in prayer to help you see clearly what tempts you, what distracts you, what gets you sidetracked in life.

If you or I were packing for a six week trip, we would overpack, we'd take so much stuff. Jesus went into the wilderness with nothing to distract him or weigh him down.

So start with prayer, ask the question, what tempts you?

Keep asking it, keep returning to it.

Be open to what God reveals to you so you can take on the Spring Cleaning Lent should be about and so you can return to God this Easter with your whole heart.

Today's bulletin contains a list of all our Lenten offerings.

I'd like to point out two.

First, I want to encourage you to join us on Fridays at 7pm for Stations of the Cross as we walk with Jesus the road to Calvary.

Each Friday will also include a personal reflection by a parishioner.

Second, we have a series takeaway (hold up) that you can pick up as you leave church today, it's on the tables at the exits.

In it, there are suggested daily scripture passages for you to read and reflect on each day, so that like Jesus, you can develop a deep knowledge of scripture.

### **SCREEN: Spring Cleaning main screen**

In the upcoming weeks of this series, we will talk about other ways to do the spiritual Spring Cleaning God wants.

We will hear how we can tune out the noise in our lives, how we can leave the past behind, how we can offer God our brokenness, and on the final week of this series, how we can let go of fear and doubt.

Please make a commitment to be here for every message.

And if you miss a week for any reason, know you can always catch up by listening to the message or downloading the text from our website.

So, this Lent can be a powerful season of grace and change for you.

The opportunities are all there.

Experts say it takes 21 days for a new habit to stick.

The Church gives us 40 days for change to stick in our lives.

Commit to change this Lent by choosing to return to God with your whole heart.

Amen. +

***AT 11:30 ONLY:*** Today we are praying in a special way for those in our Becoming Catholic program who are being sent to the Rite of Election this afternoon with the Archbishop.

***(go to chair to read from binder).*** 