

Lent, 2017... Our Lenten Journey

How quickly time seems to fly... at least to me. It seems that just yesterday was Christmas and New Year. We're three months into 2017.

This is why I like the Church calendar with its various seasons and celebrations. Life is not the 'same old', 'same old'. As we move thru our Church's year we encounter God's mystery of love, a journey that describes creation, fall, the history of sin and deliverance, God's choosing a special people, the prophets calling them to walk in God's ways... and the culmination of our sacred history... the stories of Jesus. God's love will not be outdone by sin and darkness. Now we add the story of our life to this Sacred History – we're part of ongoing salvation.

This March we begin our Lenten journey.

Lent is a time of preparation for catechumens who will be baptized into our Church at the Easter Vigil Service.

Lent is also a time for all of us who are baptized to prepare ourselves to recommit ourselves to our baptismal promises which will take place at Mass on Easter.

On Ash Wednesday we received our ashes... and hear the words from the person administering the ashes,

"Repent and follow or recommit yourself to the Gospel."

The Gospel is the 'Good News' of God's redeeming actions in our world. Our Baptismal promises draw us into this Good News. We are now a part of God's story.

In many ways our society is no longer Christian. It no longer follows many of the Christian practices and values. But we do follow them.

In the Ash Wednesday Gospel we hear about prayer, fasting and almsgiving. When was the last time you heard any of these mentioned in a commercial on TV, or discussed on a TV show?

Our culture is into being a happy, entertained consumer, buying more stuff that is guaranteed to make us happy.

That's why Lent is an important time for us. We take another look at some of our Christian values and practices and examine our conscience to see if they are part of our lives.

In the Ash Wednesday Gospel Jesus names three values which he considers important. Let's take a brief look at them.

Fasting.... Jesus asks us to fast. Our society never talks about the spiritual practice of fasting. We diet – similar to fasting. But dieting is to get in shape, to look good, to be healthy.

Fasting is a spiritual practice wherein we deny our excessive self-indulgence,

we try to restrain ourselves from constantly pampering ourselves... whether with food, drink, shopping, too much TV or too much Internet...

We Americans tend to eat too much, too rich, too supersized... believing that food will fill the hole in our hearts and drink will make us happy...

Fasting helps us to recognize that our real need is for God to fill that hole in us.

We fast for another reason too – at least for a little while we recognize and identify with the world's poor and starving – to have empathy with them.

Our fasting at the very least reminds us of these others and perhaps challenges us to reach out in any small way we can to help them.....

Almsgiving... Another practice Christ refers to is almsgiving... generously sharing our blessings with some needy person. This could be with money, or with our time, talents and efforts. As Christians we don't make excuses why we shouldn't help... we do what we can to help. We can't solve the world's problems, and we don't necessarily feel guilty about them, but we do try to help a bit.

We might visit the sick, or buy some groceries for a shut in, or give a contribution to a food pantry.

Prayer... A third Christian practice Jesus refers to is prayer.... Are we people of prayer? Do we pray each day, or are we just too busy?

Do we say a morning offering, giving our day to God? If we don't pray daily, the next time we go to confession, which will hopefully be during this Lent, we might confess that we are spiritually lazy...

Prayer, our lifting our minds and hearts to God each day, is an important Christian practice.

Lent is a time to examine our lives and ask, "Am I living up to my baptismal promises, which I will again repeat at my Easter Mass?" Do I pray? Do I fast? Do I give alms? Can I do something this Lent to change some things about my life – just a few, to incorporate these Christian practices into my life?

May God's peace and blessings be with you this Lent.

Fr. Don Ware, C.P.