

Letting This Lent Be God's – Reflections by Sis Clarita

What if this Lent we didn't approach the practices of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting with an eye to what we can do to transform ourselves, but rather with an eye to what God wants to do in order to transform us?

Too often we approach Lent as though it were a series of New Year's resolutions: to give up a particular bad habit, or share more with the poor, or be more faithful to prayer.

But Lent is not about self-improvement. Lent is a time of conversion in which God is in charge of our conversion. Not us. After all, Lent is a preparation for the season of Easter, and in Easter we see that Jesus comes to save us, despite ourselves. Peter swears up and down that he will never betray Jesus, but then he does. A thief on the cross ends up being the first to be in Heaven with Jesus, a most unexpected consolation. Women go to the empty tomb to mourn and end up being missioned by Jesus, resurrected. Jesus reconciles with Peter despite the betrayals and then gives him a central place in Church leadership.

Easter is full of the unpredictable. Easter is a lot of crazy, beautiful surprises with the Resurrection at its heart. If this is true, then Lent is not a project of self-improvement. Rather, it's a time of allowing God to transform us. Lent is a time of intentional cooperation with God's graces, where God leads and we follow, like a good dance partner. We can choose to follow or not, but God is always in the lead. What might this look like in practice? The answer will be individual for each one of us, and so a Lent of following God's lead must be grounded in prayer. We can listen for the voice of God and let ourselves be surprised by what the call in Lent might be.

Perhaps we not only contribute to our paper rice bowls with alms for the poor, but also feel God calling us to undertake service work where we build relationships with a community of people outside our comfortable social circles.

Or maybe fasting this year means not only the obligatory fasts, but also fasting from judgment when I do not know the inner workings of another's heart.

Perhaps God is calling me to add in a different form of prayer: a few minutes of silence on my lunch break at work, or praying as a family just before the children

are tucked into bed. Or perhaps we will feel the call of God out of the blue in Lent to follow God into some new place.

Are we open to letting this Lent be God's and not our own? As you pray through this Lenten pandemic, I invite you to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit deep in your heart. Remember that Jesus was ministered by angels in the desert; keep in mind that God is also caring for you in this sacred time.

As you open your heart and mind to love, to the challenge of trust and transformation, may you come to a greater awareness of how deeply loved you truly are. You are sacred. You are valued. You are not alone. You are a beautiful and beloved child of God.

Let's remember that we're made for community, and that this is the Christian way. Let's reach out to our friends and neighbors; let's utilize technology for sacred relationships, for community building. Let's pray together and help each other through our struggles. Let's encourage one another and be the beacons of hope that others need to see.

Then, united in love and filled with God's grace, we will all emerge again one day, more fully alive and in tune with the way of Jesus Christ. We'll be stronger and healthier. We'll be more grounded and clear headed. We'll be able to serve with greater courage and love.

This is a time for renewal, preparation and restoration. This is a holy time.