

At the start of Lent four weeks ago, I shared how I've never appreciated people asking me what I was giving up for Lent. I just want the two of you who came up to me after Mass that day and asked me anyway, to know, that I forgive you... maybe. I'm thinking about it. Now don't get me wrong. I think sharing about our Lenten journeys as well as individual practices and sacrifices is a very good thing. I just think it should be voluntary, that's all.

A couple of weeks ago, I was at a parish gathering meeting where one of our fellow parishioners shared a bit of her personal journey. She said she had chosen 3 or 4 different sacrifices but so far had failed at all of them all that is except one. And the one she was persevering in was the one which involved the greatest sacrifice. She was determined to see it through and was not going to give up.

I found this very uplifting. First, it's nice to find someone who isn't afraid to openly talk about their faith instead of the everyday minutia. Secondly, she was willing to honestly admit her failures. But of course, the most impressive revelation was her determination to see the tough, and so far, only remaining practice through until the end. I was impressed. She was NOT giving up. I like it: "Lent for real people". It could be a show or You Tube channel or something.

You know, our Lenten journeys are not always perfect or pleasant or

successful. They're kind of like life. And in truth, the failures aren't necessarily meaningless if we learn something. Most of the Lenten gospel stories this cycle show us that an encounter with Jesus can have some less than perfect wrinkles in them. Think about it, some of the apostles witnessed Jesus being transfigured, but within the hour, they told him not to go to Jerusalem to face the cross because it might not be safe. *Did they miss something?* Of course, this is the same bunch who couldn't figure out why he was conversing with the woman at the well. At least she figured it out. Last week, the man cured of his blindness, well, he ends up being ridiculed and then thrown out of the synagogue. And this week, we have arguably Jesus' greatest public miracle in the whole Gospel. But was it a total success? Think of Lazarus. Was he the reason for the miracle? Because he was Jesus' special friend? Yes, he was raised from the dead, but he wasn't glorified. He will have the rare experience of dying more than once. Would we want that? I don't know. Maybe once is enough. In any case, I think it's safe to say this miracle was not performed for Lazarus' sake.

So, is it about Jesus demonstrating his power? Not entirely. Jesus healed countless times before and had even raised others from the dead. There were healers in the Old Testament, too, and the prophet Elijah also raised someone

from the dead. But Jesus is not just a miracle worker or gifted healer. It's not about what He does, it's about who He is, and why He does it. Some scripture scholars even claim that the reason He gets perturbed and even weeps in this passage is because He's saddened and frustrated by the fact that those closest to him can't fully grasp who He is. He is the Son of God. He even shares His conversation with the Father before calling Lazarus to rise, to help people understand this. Jesus is the Resurrection: the one who can and does conquer death. He is the Life; meaning He is our doorway to eternal life. There is no other. What we are most fearful of, death, need no longer be a threat. Jesus will show us this when He gets to Jerusalem, but that part of the story will be told next week.

For now, Jesus continues on His journey to the cross. And that, in part, is also what we do during Lent: we prepare ourselves to embrace the cross with Him. We do it, not because we are maudlin or enjoy the suffering; it's the only way to the other side. By dying to ourselves a little in our Lenten practices we make room for Him in our lives. When we join with Him in suffering, then the cross, like death, is a doorway to eternal life. That's the Paschal Mystery.

Like a few others I see here today, I am a founding member of this parish. Over the years, I remember every pastor we've had preach the same theme at least once during Lent. "It's not too late." If we haven't embraced Lent yet this year, there's still time. If it takes until Good Friday, then so be it. If your Lenten practices have been a series of Lenten failures, don't give up, keep trying. If you feel dead, then let's get to reconciliation and like Lazarus, get raised up. If you still aren't feeling it, keep coming back. We cannot connect with Christ without encountering Him. It's not about feelings anyway. Jesus isn't looking for our feelings, He longs for our presence and our willingness to enter into communion with him. Our Faith in Christ, which we will solemnly profess in our baptismal promises on Easter, will turn into the Life of Christ which then flows through us to the world around us.

In two weeks, we will finally get past the encounter with the cross. For now, let's keep preparing ourselves for it. If we stumble under the weight of the cross, so be it. We'll be in good company. As children of God, and with His help, we'll see this through, together. I've said it before and I'll say it again. It will be worth it.