

Well, we are five weeks into Lent, and the end is coming up soon. How is it going? Or rather, how are your Lenten practices going? You know, I employ the shotgun approach. I try a number of things hoping at least some will hit the target. There are a few things I do year after year and they work well for me. But I like to try some different things as well. Surprisingly, I had good luck with something new this year. Now, it probably won't seem like much to you, but it worked well for me. I gave up my slippers. Sure, it doesn't seem like much, but when you crawl out of your nice warm bed in the morning and you have to go downstairs onto that cold bathroom and kitchen floor, it makes you think, "Why am I doing this again? Oh, yeah." And then again when you get home at night after a long hard day and you want to slip into some nice comfortable slippers, but no, you again have to remind yourself. I'm giving up this simple pleasure to discipline myself and remind me of the much greater sacrifice that was given up for me. I'll be honest, the first thing I learned about not having slippers to slip on when I get home, is just how many pairs of socks I own that have holes in them. Not exactly the increase in holiness I was looking for... but... technically... I'm just saying.

The first reading today, if you didn't realize it, is a landmark/watershed moment in the Bible. It is the first revelation of the New Covenant. Unlike the old

covenant, it does not rely so much on others interpreting a set of laws or precepts written in stone. The new law is one of love where we are tasked with living as we ought by the word and example of God Himself, whom we came to know in the person of Jesus Christ. It's an absolute perfect reading for the season of... Advent. *OK*, but the Church offers it to us in Lent. Why? I think it is because of the last phrase, "... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more." Ladies and gentlemen, this is a heck of a deal. We, like the Jewish people, don't live up to our end of covenants, do we? We do things we know we shouldn't and we live our lives sometimes as if our personal pleasure or gain is all that matter. But God offers to forgive and forget if we try anew. But it comes with a cost.

Last month Monica and I went on vacation in the warm Caribbean like we do every couple of years. And I've noticed that no matter where people live or are from, they are all pretty similar. There are good people and not-so-good people. But when it comes so called "good" people, there is also a further distinction. Some folks treat others well... as long as they have something to gain by it. Sort of a "quid pro quo". And that's ok if we are talking about a business transaction, but what about those folks who don't have something in kind to offer or give back?

What if they grew up in poverty, or if their parents, if they had any, were addicted, or abusive? Would the “quid pro quo” people be kind to them, or just ignore them?

When it comes to our relationship with God, we really don't have anything to bargain with on our own. We don't have anything God needs or that he didn't give to us as a gift already. We're broke, or more accurately, broken: we can't pay for the damage we've done, or the sins we've committed. But we are not to despair, or as Father Tom said last week, we are not hopelessly condemned, so we shouldn't go there. There is a path out of our mess and Christ leads us to it. It's not without pain or suffering, but Christ promises us an eternal blessed existence if we follow Him.

What is the ultimate goal of Lent? Easter glory. But to get there we have to pass through the cross of Good Friday. And we need to prepare ourselves for it. It is the path we must follow.

In today's gospel we see Jesus preparing Himself for the cross. He's preached the good news, called for repentance, and performed enough healings for people to recognize He had divine authority. Now, as we heard, Jesus readies himself to face the worst humanity could offer and to demonstrate His love for us and His willingness to sacrifice His human life, to set us free and pay any and all debt for our misdeeds and selfish actions. So we need to remind ourselves we are not a

condemned people so we shouldn't act like it. Our God is one of love and hope, not one of vengeance and wrath.

But some people, mostly outside the Church, and even a few in it, take that to mean we're ok if we stay the way we are, even in our sinfulness. No, Jesus calls us out of our broken lives where we fall prey to sin. He asks us to change our ways. He doesn't justify our sins, He justifies us as His good and loving and *lovable* creation. We must simply repent, believe, and try to live as we ought. So, for the remaining week or so of Lent, *let us try*. Every year since the inception of this parish, and I've been here since day one, a similar message has always gone out from this ambo: it's not too late. Let's embrace Lent, in attitude at least, and maybe a practice or two, something small perhaps that we can succeed in. We can always go for something more challenging next year. Let's not be afraid to face the cross together, led by Jesus Christ. He will get us to the other side. He is the ultimate "good" person. Not a quid pro quo type.

The older I get, the more I realize a world without Christ and without those who follow Him is not a world I want to live in, nor do I want my kids and grandkids to experience it. I say let's follow Him, for their sake, for our sake, and for the sake of His Love & Mercy.