

February 28, 2017
Shrove Tuesday

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we begin the holy season of Lent it is important to remember who we are and what we are meant to do as followers of Jesus.

Lent is a time of self-reflection and growing self-awareness aided by spiritual disciplines which help us to 'get real' about ourselves. Spiritual disciplines come in lots of shapes and sizes, but they all have the same purpose – to form us into the image of God we are created to be, and as faithful disciples of our Lord.

Abstinence from certain kinds of food or beverages can often approximate, in some small way, the reality of daily life for those who live in constant need, and to reflect on the experience. How do I feel when I'm hungry? How do I treat others when I'm preoccupied about food? How willing am I to forego some part of my usual food intake? What might I do with the money I would generally spend on food and drink? How well do I function when I know my next meal is many hours away and will be very small? Does my attitude change toward others who are not engaging in this experiment?

We can also abstain from other things – gossip, speculation, procrastination, inactivity, resentment.....what effect would abstaining from any of these things have in my life and my relationships?

Lent is also a time when we can experiment with new disciplines; prayer, journaling, study, volunteering at a shelter or some other community ministry....and faithful Sunday worship. Such disciplines can remind us that there is never a time when God is absent from us, and that everything we say and do either reflects God's love to the world, or it does not. Every word, every action, can be an intentional communication of God's love, or it can convey something very different....

The Bible is very clear in communicating God's commandments to love, and we have the special teaching of Jesus that we are to love others not only as we love ourselves, but as he loves. Jesus was very clear in teaching that there is no one we can faithfully describe as 'not my neighbor.' Every other human being is the image of God. Every person is beloved by God. Every person is to be sought out and served as Christ. And that means everyone.

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus spoke of the danger of carrying anger and condemned it as murderous. He taught that non-violent means are to be used even when injustice is being

challenged. Our own baptismal covenant commits us to striving for justice and peace among all people, and respect for the dignity of every person.

So let's be clear - threats against brothers and sisters whose skin color is different, whose sexuality is different, whose religious practice is different, will never be acceptable among faithful followers of Jesus. When confronted with something we don't understand, or trust, or appreciate, we always have the option to become curious about it, rather than condemning it out of hand. The Bible consistently praises those who seek wisdom....and wisdom never has to resort to vile threats and menacing behaviors.

During this Lenten season, I urge that we all abstain from the things which cause fear and division and take up those spiritual disciplines which can bring us to a better understanding of ourselves and our world. Let us all pray that our hearts and minds become open to the working of the Holy Spirit and that we grow in the love which can transfigure both us and the world.

Blessings,

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