

A Lenten Reflection

Lent is a season of reflection, re-evaluation, repentance and reconciliation. Lent is a time of profound grace and we are invited to let that grace sink in, take root and change us. Through our observance of these days by listening to the Scripture from the Lenten liturgies and by participating in the traditional practices of the Church, we are invited, in this holy season, to be stripped down and cleansed from all the obstacles that keep us from seeing our true selves clearly; stripped down so that we may come to understand more powerfully the Love of God who embraces all of who we are.

There are many ways to enter into the spirit of the season and to "observe" these days. It is not so important what we do as it is important that we do something to make these days different from all the rest. One great way to enter into this season is by following the traditional practices of the Church which are: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. What is great about these practices is that they give us a way to enter into this season of healing with body and soul; physically and spiritually.

Almsgiving, which is more than just giving away money but also giving of our time through serving the needs of those around us, is a practice which encourages us to let go of things (money, possessions, our valuable time) which may have taken on too high a priority in our lives. Almsgiving encourages us to strip away those "things" which can cause us to be separated from one another. It also challenges us to take a serious look at distinguishing between what we need and what we want.

In the same spirit of examining our needs and wants, fasting, which is a practice of rearranging our eating habits either by cutting down on consumption or by abstaining all together, helps us to be reminded of our need for God to fill us. Fasting allows us to feel physically the ongoing spiritual needs of the soul and can help us to feel the truth that only God can truly satisfy our deepest longings. Almsgiving and fasting help us to do, to feel, to tangibly experience the season of Lent.

Prayer is the other traditional practice in the Church, and through prayer we are able to experience Lent on a spiritual level. Prayer slows us down, allows us to be focused, and enables us to be stripped away from our obsession with this world and moves us to a higher consciousness. Prayer allows us to "see" our life and our works with the eyes of faith that opens the heart to seeing God in the midst of it all.

An excerpt of a reflection by Fr. Tom Gaughan, CSC

Almsgiving

by **Rosie Riordan McDowell**

This season known on the Church calendar as Lent, invites us to change our lifestyle to grow as people of God. The goal of this growth is to become more like Jesus. It seems no small coincidence that this Lenten season occurs on the yearly calendar at about the same time as the spring season, also associated with growth and rebirth. Almsgiving may help us to achieve this growth. The simple definition of almsgiving is charity, literally giving of our resources to others who don't have as many. On the surface then, almsgiving doesn't seem too difficult: put a couple of dollars in the basket in Church on Sunday. If we think more deeply about giving however, we realize it's not that simple.

The New Testament story of the woman who offers her two cents worth at the Jerusalem temple illustrates the complexity. Jesus recognizes her offering, small though it was, as sincere; she had nothing else to give. For the woman, giving those two coins was a true sacrifice. The others who made offerings that day, Jesus tells us, gave from their surplus. Their donations were less valuable to them than the woman's two coins were to her. When we think about almsgiving this Lenten season we might think in terms of what is most valuable to us and decide to give that.

We can probably very easily afford that couple bucks in the basket: we would just have to drink one fewer cappuccino or Snapple this week. What is that I guard and value so highly that I wouldn't think of giving it to someone else? Do I have some unique gift or talent that I have never shared with anyone? Do I really need to spend all my time studying tonight, or could I spend some of my evening with a lonely dormmate, a person with a disability, a homeless person, a former convict, a child looking for a mentor, a drug addict trying to get clean? What could I give that would truly be a sacrifice? Am I giving from my surplus, or am I giving of myself? Whatever we offer as our almsgiving this Lent, we could learn from the sincerity of the woman at the temple; we could give something that will make us feel as if we have nothing else to give.

Editor's note: Rosie is a 1993 Notre Dame graduate currently working with the Logan Center in South Bend.