

8th Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)

March 1 & 2, 2014

All Saints Parish, Syracuse, NY

Rev. Fred Daley

Lent is Upon Us!

I'm always happy at the beginning of Lent, because I can tell my Utica Story! So here it is... again! During World War II when there was a shortage of food and other necessary items, the Bishop of Albany lifted the rule to abstain from meat on the Fridays of Lent. But the Bishop of Syracuse, kept the rule in place.

The Univac Factory was in a very large building, half in Oneida County in the Syracuse Diocese, and half in Herkimer County in the Albany Diocese. So: If on a Friday, you ate your bologna sandwich on the Oneida County side - you would commit a mortal sin and go to hell (unless you got to confession first!) but if you ate your bologna sandwich on the Herkimer County side - you'd be okay, no problem...!

So, on the Friday's of Lent, all the Catholics walked over to the Herkimer County side of the building for lunch and enjoyed their bologna sandwiches free from sin and guilt!

Thank God our way of approaching the Lenten Season has changed! Still, Lent remains a very special time in the lives of Catholics, a graced-filled time of conversion.

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One day a pastor was interviewing one of the RCIA candidates who was preparing to come into full communion with our Catholic Church:

"So you have been converted to Christ!"

"Yes!"

"Then you must know a great deal about Christ..., tell me what country was he born in?"

"I don't know."

"What was his age when he died?"

"I don't know."

"How many sermons did he preach?"

"I don't know."

"Well! You certainly know very little for a person who claims to be converted to Christ!"

"You are right; I am ashamed at how little I know about him..."

But this much I do know: three years ago I was a drunk; I was in debt; my family was falling to pieces. My wife and children would dread my return home each evening..., but now: I have given up the drink, we are out of debt! Ours is now a happy home; my children eagerly await my return home each evening.

All this Christ has done for me. This much I know of Christ!"

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Sisters and brothers, this Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, beginning the Season of Lent. "Lent" literally means "springtime"! Each year the Church invites us, as disciples, to go on a 40 day retreat: to do a bit of 'spring-cleaning' in our hearts, our souls, our spiritual centers. Ashes - which are made from the palms used in last year's Palm Sunday Celebration - are placed on our foreheads with the words: "Turn away from your sins and be faithful to the Gospel."

Lent is an opportunity for personal transformation. A time to face those things in our life that are hindering us from becoming the person God created us to be. The man in our story knew that he had a problem, and knew that - by himself - he was powerless to do much about it. He had tried everything, but only in letting go..., surrendering..., reaching out to Jesus was he transformed, ...reborn, and set free. He "let go and let God!" Yet all too often we are afraid to go to God...

Our readings for this weekend present very powerful images of God to assist us on our Lenten journey of "letting go and letting God."

In our first reading, the community of Zion felt abandoned, felt all alone in the midst of their problems and struggles... being in exile. The prophet Isaiah encourages them by sharing a very beautiful and comforting feminine image of God:

*“Can a mother forget her infant? Or be without tenderness
for the child of her womb?
Yet: even should she forget, I will never forget you!”*

In Psalm 62, the Psalmist reminds us that only in God can our soul be truly at rest. God is our rock and salvation, our safety, our strength, our refuge. The Psalmist encourages us to trust God and to pour out our hearts before God; and that is what Lent is all about; that is what being a disciple of Jesus is all about: “letting go and letting God”!

In our Gospel, Jesus reminds us that false gods - like money - will never relieve our anxiety, our worry, our stress; but only in God will we truly find peace and life and fulfillment.

“Seek first the realm of God and all else will be given you besides!”

“Let go and let God” will be the guiding theme for our Lenten journey here at All Saints...

The spiritual writer, Anthony DeMello shares this reflection:

“In the gospel according to Luke we read the following:

*But Peter said, ‘Man I do not know what
you are talking about.’ At that moment, while
he was still speaking, a cock crew; and the
Lord turned and looked straight at Peter... and
Peter went outside and wept bitterly.*

I had a fairly good relationship with the Lord. I would ask him for things, converse with him, praise him, thank him...

But always I had this uncomfortable feeling that he wanted me to look into his eyes ... And I would not. I would talk, but look away when I sensed he was looking at me.

I always looked away. And I knew why. I was afraid. I thought I should find accusation there of some unrepented sin. I thought I should find a demand there: there would be something he wanted from me.

One day I finally summoned up courage and looked! There was no accusation. There was no demand. The eyes just said, 'I love you.' I looked long into those eyes. I looked searchingly. Still, the only message was, 'I love you!'

And I walked out, and, like Peter, I wept.”

Each week in our bulletin, our director of Faith Formation, Kathy Meus, poses a question for us to ponder during the week ahead. For adults, this week our question is: “What things do you worry about most frequently? How do you let go and let God?” And, for our children the question is “When you are worried about a test at school, playing in a school sport, making a new friend, or something else, do you share your thoughts with your Mom or Dad, and with Jesus? Why or why not?”

My brothers and sisters, may this Lent be a fruitful journey of conversion for us all! Amen