

The Good News

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How to Keep a Good Lent

Editor: the following article was adapted from a sermon by The Reverend Peter J. Gomes, Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in The Memorial Church at Harvard University, delivered during Lent in 1999.

Each year, as Lent comes, I am asked by interested people as to how they should organize their intentions and ambitions for the forty days. No two persons respond in the same way to Lent, and I am not going to try to prescribe a rigorous course of behavior. Experience tells me, however, that what I propose works, and because it does, I am eager to share it with you. Lenten work, for that is what it is, can be organized around three Ss: Silence, Study and Service.

SILENCE

The world is a noisy place, and even our small corner of it has more than its fair share of noise. Silence is therefore a rare and precious thing, particularly when we realize that silence is not simply the absence of sound but is also the presence of that which sound ordinarily obscures. For us, silence can be the place in which we both seek and experience the presence of God. I suggest that you secure yourself *fifteen minutes of absolute silence* during at least one day each week in Lent, in which you do nothing at all: no mental correspondence, no organizing, not even high thinking. Find a space or place in which you can be alone, the bathroom or the bedroom will do, and clear your head. Some find it well to do this at the start of the day, getting up earlier than usual, and others at midday, foreshortening lunch, or right before evening begins. Do not schedule your silent time for bedtime: You will fall asleep, and although sleep is silent, it is not the silence of which we speak. I propose one day with a fifteen-minute silence, but once you try, it you may crave more and wonder how you got along without it.

STUDY

An ambitious course of study and rigorous reading is not necessary to make a good use of Lent, but some ordered reflection in which your mind is engaged on a regular basis is very much an approved discipline. Set aside *fifteen minutes for study* on one day of each week in Lent. This will take the form of reading for most, but you should think in advance about what it is that you are to read, and organize the reading so that you make the most of your time. Do not try to be too ambitious, as failure will make the possible impossible. If you wish to read from the Bible, choose one of the four gospels and organize your reading into six sections of fifteen minutes. Perhaps you will want to read through the whole Psalter in the same fashion, reading no more and not less in a single sitting once per week than the fifteen minutes allow. Perhaps you will want to try a book. I suggest J. Barrie Shepherd's *Faces at the Cross: A Lent and Easter Collection of Poetry and Prose* from Upper Room Books. I am rereading Diogenes Allen's little book, *Temptation*.

SERVICE

Contrary to popular perception, Lent is not private or personal. From ancient times it has had a communal, public, even civic dimension wherein the faithful are encouraged to do good works and deeds of public charity and private philanthropy. Lest you become too private and self-absorbed in Lent, you should find a way in which you might give time to some work or kindness which is not only for yourself. Fifteen minutes may seem a devilishly small amount of time for good works, given the pressing needs of this world, yet *fifteen minutes of* (continued on page 2)

On Sunday, March 29 Bishop Bud Cederholm will visit St. Mary's and celebrate the 10:00 a.m. Service of Holy Eucharist. Please plan to attend. Bishop Cederholm will meet with the congregation in an Adult Forum following the service. Extended child care will be available during the Adult Forum.

How to Keep a Good Lent (continued)

careful and prayerful focus on service, on what you can and should do as a work of kindness, is not too much to consider, and if used well, sets the stage for more extended exercises in charity and philanthropy. Where can you do some good? Who needs your help? What might you do if, for instance, you have spare change? Is there some person or place waiting for your particular skills and graces? Thinking soberly and creatively about these things for fifteen minutes each week is time well spent, and very well spent indeed if it leads you to action.

A ROUTINE FOR PRACTICAL PEOPLE

How should the time be organized? I suggest that every alternate day serve as the occasion for your Lenten disciplines. For example, devote Monday to silence, Wednesday to study and Friday to service. Of, if you wish, try a Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday schedule. Use the off-day for reflecting upon what you have done or are about to do, perhaps by keeping a record of your thoughts in a diary or journal, or in the form of a letter to yourself or to someone else. If you spend a little time in recording your thoughts about the process you will have the added benefit of charting your journey. Be sure to record your failures and low thoughts as well as your successes and ambitions.

REMEMBER TO TAKE SUNDAYS OFF

The Sundays following Ash Wednesday and through Palm Sunday are Sundays *in* Lent and not Sundays *of* Lent, and from ancient times each of these Sundays has been intended to be a Sabbath from the rigors of Lenten discipline. Provided that you keep a week-day Lenten discipline such as I have proposed, you will need a Sabbath, a rest, and Sunday is it. Thus, you should endeavor to come to church every Sunday in Lent as reward for your labors, encouragement in the effort, and preparation for the week ahead. You should keep that Sabbath as a holy day along with your fellow Lenten pilgrims: This is another essential aspect of the public nature of Lent. You will need help in your Lenten work, all the help you can get, and you will find it at church on Sunday mornings.

MAKING MORE OF LESS

Some will ask what good can come of so little time spent in Lenten work: fifteen minutes every other day of the week, a mere forty-five minutes out of a whole week's time? If you feel ambitious you could try to extend the investment by doing the three exercises every day, or one on each day, or you could increase the fifteen minute suggested time, but I hasten to remind you that it is not the quantity of time but its regularity and quality that counts for work in Lent. It is better to succeed in little than to fail in much, and more Christians have been lost to the faith by attempting so much that they are destined to fail, unable to do anything. Spiritually, as in other matters, we must crawl before we walk, and walk before we run or leap. My counsel is to try the routine as proposed until at least mid-Lent, and then adjust it as you wish. The secret is in organizing in advance so that you can practice your Lenten discipline without being distracted by constantly having to think and plan. Make a calendar, produce a schedule, post it on the refrigerator door, and, above all, check off what you have done so that you can visualize your achievement. You would do nothing less than this to lose weight: Why not try at least this to enrich your soul?

During Lent share your progress and your reactions with anyone who will listen. I wish you well in the journey, and pray that this Lent will make a difference in your life as you move toward Easter.

Update from the Wardens on Peter's Retirement

During the past two weeks, the Wardens and Vestry have had meetings with Peter Chase, Bishop Cederholm, and the Diocesan Office on Transition to insure that Peter's retirement and the start of the transition process are smooth and professional.

A letter from the Wardens will be mailed to parish members next week with a detailed report on the meetings with the Diocese and transition plans, the process by which the Search Committee for a new rector will be appointed and plans for celebrating Peter's retirement. *Please note that Peter's last Sunday celebrating services at St. Mary's will be Pentecost, Sunday, May 31.*

Recognition by The Salvation Army

At a recent recognition dinner in Framingham, The Salvation Army gave a certificate of appreciation to St. Mary's for a 15-year record of supporting the Army's Miracle Kitchen. The certificate is on display in the parish hall.

That Which Can Kill Us Can Also Be Our Salvation

Editor: The following article was adapted from Peter Chase's March 22 sermon.

I remember watching a TV show as a child that told the story of a man bitten by a poisonous snake. Tension mounted as the doctors tried to find the serum which would save him. The clock ticked as they finally resorted to extracting the venom from another snake and mixing it up with something before injecting it into the man's arm. I wondered, "How could the same thing that was killing this man be his only hope of being saved?" The venom causing his death was the same medicine that would deliver healing and a cure. Later, I found out that this same principle was applied in my childhood vaccinations to produce immunity by causing the formation of antibodies.

The symbol of medicine is a shield of the star of life within which is an emblem of a snake wrapped around a pole or staff, representing the golden wand of medicine, Caduceus and Asclepius. And then, of course, there is the symbol of The Red Cross, where an instrument of execution becomes a symbol of protection and healing. Ironically, the symbol the Romans used to threaten a horrific death becomes an emblem of being saved from a devastating end.

The snake is a fascinating symbol in ancient mythology. The snake represents vengefulness and vindictiveness at the same time it is used as a symbol for renewal and rebirth. The snake is connected to rebirth because it can shed its old skin revealing a new one. In the Old Testament, the snake is called the most cunning of God's creatures, and aside from humans, one of only two animals capable of speech in the Bible.

Speech implies wisdom, and the snake's habitat in Genesis is wrapped around the Tree of Knowledge. In ancient mythology and in some of the oldest traditions throughout the world, the snake is pictured as a fearful creature protecting people from a knowledge that is too hard to take. In Genesis the snake is wrapped around the Tree of Life whose fruit provides the wisdom of both Good and Evil. The snake represents life and death, beginning and end, its head resembles its tail, and it lives on land and water. Actually the word *amphibian* comes from the Greek word "amphis" which means "both ways."

In our Gospel reading from John, Jesus alludes to the Book of Numbers whereby "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." Moses was a good snake handler in Exodus. We are told his staff became a snake when cast to the ground and once again became his staff when lifted up, a sign of leadership in times of fear. Also in the Book of Numbers, the wandering Israelites encounter an infestation of poisonous snakes. The Lord instructs Moses to make a shield or mantel with the depiction of a snake on it and to hold it up in their midst. Anyone who was bitten could look upon the image of the snake and be delivered from the effects of its poison.

Why would they want to look at the image of the very thing that was killing them? The snake shield became the means by which death was turned into life. And the very sign of their affliction became the symbol of its defeat. In John's Gospel, Jesus anticipates his own death on the cross as a sign of victory; the very instrument of a shameful death becomes a symbol of salvation. Similarly, the cross represents both the way of death and life. The cross signifies both good and evil, but for Christians it represents the belief that God is in the center.

When I was a senior in college, I had a terrifying dream about my mortality and talked with the chaplain who said that death comes in many ways. It comes with growing up, with graduation and moving into the unknown. But what's most important is to experience God at the center.

I was reminded of this when our daughter Gaelan moved away from home three months ago. It was both a beginning and an end. It was an emotional experience of joy and sadness. But what a blessing it was to have the faith that God is at the center of life.

It was like the time my mother passed away after several months in bed with cancer. Her death was both a blessing and a curse. Visiting her before she died was both an experience of sadness and happiness. But, God was in the midst of all of this because God is central to our living and our dying. It is in the center where we discover the Peace of God and exchange it with one another.

Over the years we have experienced both joy and sadness with people like Bruce Mossman who have been both active and bedridden. Someone said "I am happy for Bruce, but sad for me." It is both because we believe that God is in the midst of this and because Christ's death has become life for us.

This is part of the Lenten season when giving up means taking on and when letting go means truly receiving; when we focus on the centrality of God and lift high the cross which bothers us. Lent brings renewal, growth, and opportunity. I pray we keep this in the center of our thoughts.

—Peter Chase

Upcoming Events

"heARTS ALIVE" Art Show, Friday March 27-Saturday, March 28, at Trinity Church, Copley Square
This show will feature artists from the Gulf Coast region who have donated their work to be sold to benefit the St. Anna's Medical Van in New Orleans. See insert.

Soup & Cinema series on Sunday, March 29, in the Parish Hall at 5:00 p.m. followed by the film, *WALL-E*, at 6:00 p.m.

Disney and Pixar join together for this computer-animated story about a robot who is searching for a newfound friend. This film is great for the entire family. It is the final movie in the series.

Lenten Series on Tuesday, March 31 at 10:00 a.m. in the Chapter Room features a discussion on improving interfaith understanding and relationships. Speaker: The Reverend Dr. Frederick Moser, rector of The Church of the Holy Spirit in Wayland.

Wellesley Interfaith Food Drive, Month of March

The Interfaith Food Drive is ending soon. St. Mary's has been asked to donate fruit juices in plastic bottles, juice boxes or cans (no glass). As an alternative, \$10.00 gift certificates from Roche Brothers are requested.

Designated boxes are located in the narthex. On Saturday, April 4, we will gather all the food that has been collected, sorted and boxed and deliver it to the Assembly Room at The Wellesley Hills Congregational Church by 9:00 a.m. There we will celebrate the abundance of gifts and all help to put the food into their Food Pantry.

About Town

Acolyte Stoney Maynard is spending his spring semester at The Island School, on Cape Eleuthera in The Bahamas. is a mind, body, and spirit journey that takes students away from traditional high school curriculum and forces them to confront real-world problems. SCUBA diving, island exploration, and two short kayaking expeditions complement daily morning exercise, science research projects and campus work that encourages each student to develop leadership and teamwork skills....(Other news of friends and parishioners of St. Mary's is invited and should be sent to the editor.

Editor: Tim Green