



Lent

A Time of Purification and Enlightenment

The season of Lent begins on Wednesday, March 2nd. In the Scripture Readings we hear Jesus' call to turn away from selfish habits and turn more toward Him. Lent is a time of purification and enlightenment for every Christian as each person needs cleansing and healing. Let us look at two themes of Lent.

A Struggle between Good & Evil

Jesus said, "Reform your lives for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4: 17). Jesus knows that each person has attitudes, which need to be purified. These attitudes are the root causes of sin. In choosing against what is right and good, we sin, which has effects on us. We lessen our dignity and, even though sin may be committed in secret, it affects those around us.

It is necessary for us to acknowledge *the reality of sin*. When we sin, we distance ourselves from God who is perfect, self-giving love. Love and sin are opposites. There is a *real struggle between good and evil*. We can become used to the darkness and not even realize we are enslaved. There is a need to be continually exposed to the light of Christ and His grace to help us in the struggle to overcome the darkness of Satan and sin.

The Way of Life is by loving the Lord, heeding His voice and holding fast to Him. The way of death is by

turning away from God, listening to the father of lies – Satan – and worshiping false gods, by being overly attached to things and persons. These disordered attachments can take the place of God who should be at the center of our life. The two ways lead to the two Kingdoms in the world.

The Kingdom of Jesus is the Kingdom of Truth. The foundation of this Kingdom is to love God with our whole heart, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. In addition, Jesus died on the cross so that our sins can be forgiven. We, in turn, are called to forgive others. The Kingdom of Jesus is also a Kingdom of Light. Jesus says: "I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12). This enlightenment – the light of faith – allows us to know which way to go and where we are going.

The kingdom of Satan is a kingdom of lies and darkness. Jesus says that Satan "was a murderer from the beginning and there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:43-47). The good news is that Satan's kingdom has already been defeated by Jesus' death on the cross. However, he still tempts us to sin through his lies because his greatest desire is to crush us. The devil's route leads to a loss of freedom

and destroys in us the person we were created to be.

Purification of Heart and Mind

We want to prayerfully seek the strength of the Holy Spirit so He will lead us in purification which is a process of grace working within us. Actual grace comes from prayer and doing acts of kindness. We receive sanctifying grace, which is God's own Divine Life, in the Sacraments. This process *requires our cooperation and a change of heart*, which involves the whole interiority of the person.

Let us pray and ask the Holy Spirit to "*Create in me a clean heart*" as a new way to respond to those around us. (Psalm 51: 10) God gives us the strength and power to change our sinful attitudes and behaviors. So, the process of *daily* conversion, and sometimes of the hour or minute, involves God supplying what we need and our responding to His love through cooperating with His grace. This is a gradual process and takes effort. A good place to begin is by taking quiet time to be with Jesus, to rest in Him and reflect upon His Word in the Bible.

Let us set out on this Lenten journey of prayer and conversion so that we may die to personal selfishness and pride. We will experience a deeper friendship with Jesus and others.

By Ann Lankford