

## **Lent: It's All About Love**

Yesterday I was “purging my files” in anticipation of Jordan Ministry’s move to a larger office. Among the treasures I fingered was a folder marked “Lent” into which I’ve placed inspirations over the course of many years. Since we are about to welcome the Church’s annual “springtime of the soul” early this month. I thought I would share some of what I found.

The general tenor of what I saved is best captured is a poster that states in bold letters: “GOD HAS PROMISED TO MAKE BETTER LOVERS OF US ALL.”

Whether one views Lent as a renewal, an ordeal, or a return to one’s best self, This call to be a better lover is relevant and essential.

There are so many dimensions of this “loving better.” It all starts with a return to our “First Love,” the God who loved us into life itself. One year Catholic publisher Liturgy Training Publications placed this tender prayer in their Lenten resource catalogue: “Come, Lord, work upon us, set us on fire, and clasp us close. Draw us to your loveliness. Let us run to you. Let us love!” That’s an inviting and ever-so-haunting sentiment. To ask GOD to set us on fire never ends there. It’s demanding. It’s expansive. And it can spill over into every attitude and relationship we have.

Once I was at a Eucharistic liturgy in a small chapel in Vienna, Austria. On the wall behind the altar hung an old wood crucifix. Jesus was depicted with a crown of thorns pressed firmly into his skull, but he had pulled his hands free of the nails, couching his arms across his chest in a tight embrace of humanity. I still have the photo, a reminder of the power of costly love. Attached to the wall was

inscribed: “Forget yourself; follow me.” It might have read “Become a better lover.”

If anything, Lent changes hearts and habits, drawing us more deeply into intimacy with God and sending us outward to a more expansive love than previously embraced. We may shift from a generic, philosophical, feel-good Notion of love to a more practical, hands-on sharing of it. Alfred Whitehead whimsically reminds us, “The love of HUMANITY is changed by violent DISLIKE of the next-door neighbor!” Our ideal image clashes with the demands of actual living our love, applying the principle across the board! No longer can the expansive Lenten lover watch the news and say, “That’s their problem. What does this have to do with me?” or “They’re not part of my circle; love only goes so far.” But Baptism (and Lent) trump limits on love. We have more sisters and brothers that we ever claim or acknowledge.

Martin Luther King, Jr. put the challenge of expanding our love this way:

“Cowardice asks the question ‘Is it safe?’  
Expediency asks the question ‘Is it politic?’  
Vanity asks the question ‘Is it popular?’  
But conscience asks the question ‘Is it right?’”

During Lent, we are confronted with the cost of discipleship, whose astonishing model is the inclusive, faithful Jesus. I pray that our engagement with Christ, the Father’s Beloved, and our sincere relationships with others, no exceptions, would make us better lovers. Maybe fasting from sarcasm and judgment or abstaining from laziness and whining would be a good start. After all, good Lenten practices are not just meant for our intentional 40 days, but for once and for all.

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