

A Lenten Reflection

It is late February and we have just begun our Lenten journey. The days are already growing noticeably longer. That is, in fact, how Lent got its name, from the Middle English word “lenten,” “to grow long”. Lent also means “Spring”. It is, therefore, a season of **hope**, a time of yearning for the blossoming of **new life** all around us, a time to experience newborn joy in our hearts and new paths for peace and justice in our world. Lent, our Holy Father Pope Benedict tells us in his Ash Wednesday homily, “lengthens our horizons.”

Lent is a time for **fasting**. Usually we fast by giving up some favourite food or drink. We go without. The voice of Scripture, however, invites us to go within, to look into our hearts and see if there is stuff in there that we could do without, things like selfishness, envy, cynicism, boredom. Scripture also encourages us to look within our hearts and see the goodness that is in there: compassion, generosity, courage, kindness, sensitivity. We are challenged, too, to look into the heart of our Catholic school community and admit ruefully to the sight therein of things that hurt community and to the plight of people who are hurt. The same Voice calls to us to look again at our Catholic school community and see it as “our own cottage,” in Chesterton’s words, “to which we can return at evening”, and embrace it as a family of dedicated, caring, generous, warm-hearted people of God. Lent, therefore, is a time to redress what is awry and celebrate what is lovely.

Lent is most often referred to as a time of **renewal**. And, of course, it is a time for renewal, a time to cleanse the windows of perception, renew our sense of wonder, and reorder our values and priorities, a time to deepen our friendship with the living God. In a recent reflection on Lent, Joyce Rupp suggests that we see Lent as “**a period of recovery**”. She quotes Eckhart Tolle’s beautiful words: “You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is already within you, and allowing that goodness to emerge. But it can only emerge if something fundamental changes in your state of consciousness”. (*A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*). Lent offers the opportunity to recover that goodness, to allow it to surface in thought, word and action. Our state of consciousness gets blurred by the frenetic pace of our daily lives with their packed schedules and relentless pressures. Lent is a time when we should simply slow down and open our eyes to the goodness and beauty inside us and, around us, to recognize that the very dust we wore on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday, the “dust to which we will return”, is, as Pope Benedict reminded us in the Ash Wednesday homily “dust that is loved and molded by the love of God, animated by his life-giving breath, capable of recognizing his voice and responding to him.”

Let us make a conscious effort this Lent to create, each day, some **quiet time**. “Just as we cultivate the soil with air to give the roots of a plant space to grow, so we can cultivate the mind with silence to give the mind space to expand. A silent mind leads to a wide-open mind, a playing field where anything is possible, where wisdom and acceptance can grow” (Ellen Bernstein, *The Splendour of Creation*, p. 133). Let us make time for **prayer**, not only on our own but together as a community. Prayer leavens us, enlightens us and changes us. It binds us not only to God, but to one another. It broadens our vision of the needs of the world and gives us the heart and the guts to respond to them. Through prayer we discover that “God gives us songs in the night” (Job 35:10). By praying we keep God in the community and the community in God.

I would like to end this reflection with a quotation from Kahlil Gibran: “He to whom worshipping is a window, to open but also to shut, has not yet visited the house of his soul whose windows are open from dawn to dawn.