

Lent – Reflections Past & Present

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When I was a child, Lent meant things like giving up candy or putting my nickel for an ice cream in the school collection fund for the needy. I remember things like purple vestments and purple cloths covering statues and crucifixes. Mom and Dad didn't seem to eat that much; or, at least they ate less than usual. Meat wasn't served as often; when it was; only we kids ate it. There was lots of macaroni and cheese—and that's one thing I didn't like about Lent. Sundays seemed to be the only days when things eased off.

As I grew older, the purple still appeared on the scene. The school collection came around again. I was asked to consider more than just giving up candy—eating spinach, maybe. But that wasn't as bad as the macaroni and cheese that appeared more frequently on my plate. I remember really envying my younger sisters at those meals. And I really looked forward to Sundays!

Just a few recollections of "how it used to be"—but I sometimes wonder if a lot of my past attitudes about Lent, and what it's all about, aren't still very much a part of me today. I'm not saying I was raised or taught wrong. No, much more often than not, I find myself feeling quite appreciative today of my roots and how I grew up as a Catholic. Sometimes I even think a little taste of the past would be good for the present day.

I am saying that maybe I haven't completely allowed myself or really successfully tried to internalize the positive significance that Lent can be today. For example, I still kind of feel glad about Lent being over on Easter. It's not that I regret accomplishing all of the even very positive things I set out to do, and doing these for good reasons. I don't always see the joy in the process; I focus more easily on the difficulty, the inconvenience, even the pain in getting there. And these kinds of things take away from what could be the pleasantries of the journey.

Ever feel a little happy that those six weeks of Lent were over? Just a little? It's almost like, "We made it, so now we can relax a little." How often do our Lenten efforts, if they were so good, carry on throughout the following weeks and months? Why do **we** even feel like slacking up a little; easing off; or, not worrying so much about making the continued effort—when we've reached that moment of celebration, Easter? Does it have to do with the thing we've chosen to do, or the person we've striven to become?—like bitten off something we could only do or become for a short, six-week period? Maybe.

Sometimes I think I **see** Lent as more of a limited, six-week period of effort than a time of refueling for life's journey. Sometimes I see Lent as more of a trial than a joy. More of a class day than a holiday. Lent has even seemed, at times, more of a test of who I might become than an affirmation of who I am.

At such times I need to do a little re-thinking, re-evaluating—and that's part of life's journey my Weekend has freed me up to more easily do, and do often. I can't let the macaroni and cheese become something I'll put up with, knowing there's a hamburger or steak later on. Lent has purpose; it exists only to help lead us to, and be able to better celebrate, the paschal feast. It can be rightly understood only in the light of Easter And, as Easter is not meant to be celebrated for only a Sunday but each day of our lives, so too must our Lenten efforts continue so as to insure that celebration.

Lent—a time of prayer, penance, spiritual endeavor, purification of the heart, good deeds? Yes. Yet it not only prepares us for Easter celebration, but itself becomes a moment of celebration if we see it all as part of our life's journey. Joy becomes so ever-present in the midst of all our endeavors when we somehow think not only of ourselves but the good effect our endeavors will have on others. And that makes the Kingdom of God a present reality.

Lent, Easter, growth, love — a time for all reasons!