



"Come Back to Me with All Your Heart"

Lent with All My Heart

Each year, when Lent comes near, I easily return to my old instincts that Lent is supposed to be a time when I do some sacrifice to please God for six weeks. I know, in my head and heart that this isn't the meaning of Lent, but it is deeply ingrained in me, and I suspect it is for many of us.

I want to begin Lent, this year, using Ignatius' naming of a grace I desire: "Lord, lead me to the fullness of your grace." I want to ask that I might be more intent on prayer and works of charity. *This gets me closer to a Lent experience that is about what God wants to give me, rather than what I try to give God.*

When we are more "intent on prayer," [...] our prayer becomes more personal - more about our relationship with Jesus - we will discover all we need for our Lenten journey. We will discover who we are. We will discover pockets of independence, areas of resistance, patterns that are unhealthy and sinful. And, if we stay open to graces being offered us from Jesus who always desires a deep relationship with him, we will be drawn - reading by reading - story after story - into admiration and affection for Jesus, his way, and his invitation to us. ...

It is in this context that sacrifices will come. [...] What flows from this kind of prayer is "works of charity." [...] When we desire to be closer to Jesus in prayer, we live that out, not by giving up candy or alcohol, or even by chipping away at our bad habits.

The next step in living out a closer relationship with Jesus is to offer ourselves in service of others - that is, to love as Jesus loves us. Lent will lead us to ask who we are called to love and serve. Often, it will be those who are closest to us. Sometimes, it will be purifying and transformative to let our hearts be open to and compassionate for those who are deeply in need in our city, or in our world. Almsgiving has long been a central part of Lent. It allows us to exercise compassion [...]

When we let ourselves fall in love with Jesus, and then let our hearts desire to be more like his, Lent comes alive. Then, Lent moves quite directly to celebrating his love for us on those major feasts, and a profound desire to love as he has loved us. What a fruitful Lent that could be!

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