

February 14, 2024

Daily Reflections

Journeying through Lent



Center for Spiritual Development

ASH WEDNESDAY

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Today's Verse Before the Gospel

"If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

PSALM 95:8

Reflection

Lent begins today! As people of God, we are invited to consciously engage these 40 days of penance and purification for the life of our own souls and fidelity to God. Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving we make space for growing self-knowledge, seeking the grace that leads to personal transformation. We ask for the grace to see ourselves with humility and honesty and to seek forgiveness for the failings and sin that hold us hostage and block grace. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are disciplines that assist us to surrender our false self and awaken to a renewed life of faith.

There are many ways to give alms during Lent. Often almsgiving is interpreted

as financial contribution to church or charities. This stretch on our bank account is at the same time very satisfying. Generosity is greatly appreciated, and good works are done. The key is to find a cause that helps your neighbor in need through the corporal works of mercy (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, burying the dead).

Today, I want to consider a different kind of almsgiving that may relate specifically to a behavior that may be problematic to fully engaging the spiritual journey. To go one step further, this discipline of almsgiving encourages me to replace destructive behavior with positive action that leads to a life-giving pattern of behavior and a purification of motivation.

Consider “alms” as oneself. How can I give myself away and create patterns of self-gift of my attention, time, and energy? What will create in me a greater capacity for “presence” to another, as was Jesus to each person he met? If you are task-oriented like me, this is a psychological and spiritual challenge. Might it be an invitation to slow down, be interested in the other, and avail myself to self-emptying love?

Creative Almsgiving:

- Write letters or greeting cards to family members, friends, someone you admire or have not encountered for a while.
- Visit family members or neighbors, or a friend that may appreciate an unhurried visit. Renew, reframe the relationship.
- Go on a date with a spouse, or children, or grandchildren, or someone who is alone. Go somewhere enjoyable, intentionally engage, and listen to them, invite a deeper conversation with mutuality.
- Play a card or board game, do a craft with family members or friends, rather than watching TV.
- Spend time assisting the poor and vulnerable in a soup kitchen or give-away program, or volunteer in local organizations or groups as needed, out of your comfort zone.
- Gather people in your circle of influence for a conversation, shared reflection, a meal, or just the beauty of being together -- spending yourselves on one another.
- Take time to reflect on each almsgiving experience, journal, gather the graces and learnings of the experience. What are you learning about yourself, the other? Discern God’s message, desire, or grace given and received.

The point is to give yourself away for the sake of strengthening relationships. May God transform our hearts in this Lenten journey so that as Easter dawns,

we are able to live and work in the full knowledge that ***“We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 20***



Photo by Michelle DeLisle

For Pondering

- Reflect on the examples of almsgiving from the suggestions above.
 - To which are you attracted, and to which are you resistant? Why?
 - What other ways can you give yourself away?
 - From what do you seek to be freed and to what do you desire to open yourself through the discipline of Lent?
 - Pray for the grace to move to that which is life-giving.
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For Prayer

Teach me your ways, O God.

*Please reveal to me the truth about myself
and to gradually be emptied of all that stands in the way
of following you more closely.*

*I ask that you, my God, open my heart and mind
to recognize your desire for me.*

*Through the discipline of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving
may I see more clearly what you invite me to surrender to.*

*I pray for the grace to allow you to empty me and fill me
to live in your love and abiding presence.*

Please show me how to make my home in you.

All is possible by your grace and with your blessing.

Amen.

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