



COVENANT NEWS

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NEWS

COUNSELS

Lent, "a bigger and more beautiful experience than you think"

"The good news of the vocation to share the life of God"

FEBRUARY 19, 2021 00:05 ~ FR. MANUEL RIVERO, OP
~ SPIRITUALITY *Source:Zenit.org*

What is the meaning of Lent? A bigger and more beautiful experience than you think

Wednesday February 17 was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Lent comes from "forty", forty days to prepare to celebrate the paschal triduum, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This high point in the life of the Church rests on a tripod: prayer, penance and sharing. But these three approaches call for explanation. What is it exactly?

The experience offered in Lent turns out to be bigger and more beautiful than one might first think. Giving your time to prayer, your possessions to others, and giving up well-being in fasting and penance can lead to sadness and self-righteousness.

This is why Jesus invites you to smile and smell, so as not to show a livid and sinister face likely to impress others with the efforts and manifestations of spiritual life. Jesus denounces the temptation of hypocrisy which threatens public prayer, fasting made public and alms granted in public.

Prayer: entering into Christ's dialogue with his Father

Lent calls to reach the depths of the soul, where the presence of God is, without noise and without limits. The Christian can become a "pilgrim of his own heart" to move from the surface to the source of his being. In this time of pandemic which minimizes travel, the believer can experience the great journey towards God present in his soul. Meister Eckhart (+1328) spoke of the "bottomless bottom" of the soul. By descending into the depths of the soul, the faithful

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Lent: A Time for Spiritual Re-birth

THEME: We have a loving relationship with God when we repent and obey His commandment.

WORD: Gn 9:8-15 ~ Ps 25:4-5,6-7,8-9
1 Pt 3:18-22 ~ Mk 1:12-15

ORDER: **"Repent, and believe in the gospel."**
- Mk 1:15b

REFLECTION:

This Sunday's Gospel begins with Mark 1:12, "*At once the Spirit drove him out into the desert.*" The same Holy Spirit, Who was gloriously present at Jesus' baptism, now sends Jesus out into the desert to be tempted by Satan. We should not think it odd that the Spirit did this. Tests aren't meant to make us fail, but, as in the case of athletes or students, they are meant to make us better and stronger. In Jesus' case, His test was in the form of a dramatic conflict of strength and will between Himself and Satan.

There were various reasons why Jesus had to undergo this. On the part of the devil, he wanted to check the power of Jesus at the outset of His public ministry. For the Lord's part, there were also compelling reasons why He allowed Himself to be tempted. Just as the first Adam brought sin upon the human race by yielding to the temptations of Satan, so Jesus, the second Adam, would redeem us all from sin by overcoming the temptations of Satan.

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Promise of the Week

"He guides the humble to justice and he teaches the humble his way." – cf. Ps 25:9

Do not the tax collectors do the same?

In the Gospel reading for Saturday, February 27 (cf. Mt 5:43-48), Jesus establishes a new standard of love. First He cites the old approach of loving neighbors, and hating enemies. Then He turns things around and says **“love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you”** (Mt 5:44).

Sometimes, when I think about these challenging words from Christ, I imagine Him as a type of spiritual poker player who matches a bet... and then raises the stakes higher. But unlike the game of cards where there is always the risk of losing, when we love our enemies, the promise of the ultimate reward, gaining heaven, becomes more and more real, a sure thing. And upon reflection, it really makes a lot of sense.

To drive home His point, in this episode, Jesus asked a series of questions: **“For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? ...What is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?”** (Mt 5:46-47) To me, it's as if He is asking me, “Why be ordinary?” He is telling me that to gain the best prize of all, I have to go beyond what is expected of me by others, to aim higher, to elevate my expectations of myself, and to bring them more in line with what God expects from me.

Make no mistake about it, it isn't easy. But I simultaneously hear our Lord saying that I shouldn't be afraid of tackling the things that are hard and difficult. And it's true, often in life, the things that are truly worthwhile do not come easy; oftentimes, we even have to fight for them.

As for loving enemies, that might not make worldly sense, so it seems extremely difficult to do. But it's loving that has the best potential for turning an enemy into a friend. And truly, life is too short to not have as many friends as one can possibly have. So the trick might just be to love... and to love... and to keep practicing loving... loving both friends and those who aren't yet my friends... until doing that becomes easy. Because after all...



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do not come up against a wall, but they discover the living source of the grace received at their baptism.

Praying is much more than making a “little prayer” of request. Prayer remains the highest, most important and sublime human act. It can be short, but never short. “Little prayer” remains an unfortunate misinterpretation. Jesus, the Son of God made man, prays to his Father calling him “Abba”, which means “Dad” in his mother tongue, Aramaic. Never had an Old Testament believer addressed God in these terms. Jesus dialogues with his Father in trust and tenderness. Praying is not saying prayers, but letting the Holy Spirit pray in us “Abba, Father! “. “We do not pray, we are prayed”, taught Meister Eckhart following Saint Paul (Cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

Saint Seraphim of Sarov (+1883), Russian saint contemporary of Karl Marx +1883), shared his experience of God by saying that “the goal of prayer is nothing other than the acquisition of the Holy Spirit”.

For a disciple of Jesus, to pray is to pray in the Holy Spirit. By praying, he attains the state of prayer. Rather than an action, prayer becomes a state of union with God. Those who love, love all the time, without thinking about it. It is the same with the love of God.

In the Holy Spirit, the Catholic turns to the Father. It is the time to turn to God, as the preface sings to the Mass: “Let us lift up our hearts, we turn it to the Lord”.

Fasting and penance: entering into the fight of Christ Jesus against evil and the evil one

The Lenten fast cannot be reduced to a penance to master our instincts, or to a simple memory of Jesus' fasting in the desert for forty days at the beginning of his public life.

The Son of God humbled himself by becoming man; to save men, He faced the devil.

The Church asks to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The rest of the time, each Christian chooses the appropriate gestures of renunciation and penance.

For the Christian faith, fasting and penance, like prayer and sharing, are lived by Jesus with the believer and in him. These steps are bigger and more beautiful than they appear. It is about the grace of God at work in man. Pride and hypocrisy are poles apart from the mystery of Lent where the experience of God leads to humility and thanksgiving. In the parable of the prayer of the tax collector and the Pharisee (cf. Lk 18:9), Jesus clearly unmasked the spiritual perversions of the religious man who glorifies himself and not of the mercy of God revealed by the prophet Isaiah: “All our works you have done for us” (Is 26:12). Praying, fasting and sharing can become

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This was part of Jesus' mission. It could also be said that by His subjecting Himself to this test, Jesus intended for it to help us become aware of the power and cunning of the enemy.

What is the significance of the desert in the history of man's salvation? The desert or wilderness was the place where the people learned to depend on God. In the desert, they received God's law; in the desert they became a covenanted people; in the desert they were fed with spiritual food. For these reasons, Isaiah said that the way of the Lord should be prepared in the desert (cf. Is 40:3). So, it was in the wilderness that large crowds sought out John the Baptist and answered his call to repentance (cf. Mark 1:2-5).

People considered the desert a place for wild beasts and the place where Satan ruled. It was there that Jesus was led by the Spirit, and for forty days was tempted by the devil (cf. Mk 1:12-13). It was in the desert that the final battle between Jesus and the devil began.

But who is the devil? He is a fallen angel who exists as the personification of evil in the world. And we don't really need to be convinced of the existence of evil, because, from the time of Adam and Eve, who denied their personal responsibility for their sin by conjuring up the excuse that *"the serpent made us do it,"* right up to today's screaming headlines about divisive politics, racism, crime and violence, etc., we can actually *see* evil's impact.

So, where is the devil today? In a sense, the enemy is often right inside ourselves. When a man wants to do the right thing, the temptation to do otherwise is often lurking right there within him (cf. Rom 7:21). Moreover, pride is no longer just an altruistic emotion. Where pride once meant self-respect, dignity and honor, it now often results in self-glorification, conceit, and arrogance. Its excess has become the mark of the devil. Our culture is now in crisis because evil has infiltrated people's minds and is now something that we read about and experience every day. It was willful pride that caused the fallen angels' rebellion and expulsion from heaven. These fallen angels were not tempted to sin but chose it. Without repentance there will not be any redemption for Satan and his minions.

Mark's Gospel doesn't detail Jesus' encounter with the devil, but hints at the mystery of His identity. Afterward, Jesus went to Galilee, a central place for His preaching of the Good News of truth, of hope, of peace, and of the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation. A new beginning was taking place. It's the continuation of the salvation story, that through Jesus, →→

→ God was about to re-affirm His sovereignty over the world. Nevertheless, Jesus would encounter Satanic attacks again, such as at Gethsemane and during His passion.

In the story of the Great Flood, as narrated in the Book of Genesis, the rainbow was a sign of peace, embracing a renewed human race. In His mercy God gave the human race a second chance. He said that never again would all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood (cf. Gn 9:11). The rainbow became a sign of God's majesty. Then through Jesus, God gave us a New Covenant. Its outward sign, as today's Second Reading tells us, is baptism. Baptism doesn't only remove Original Sin, it is also our birth into Christ, the way through which we become adopted children of God, temples of the Spirit and sharers in the priestly, kingly and prophetic mission of Jesus. Lent reminds the baptized about their side of the Covenant and prepares the unbaptized for entry into the Covenant.

The Second Reading also says that the waters of baptism symbolize the waters of the flood. The flood destroyed all people except for eight: Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives. The waters of baptism are a cleansing agent that has the power to save all who receive it. Through the waters of baptism, God offers us spiritual life, saving us sinners from the flood waters of sin and despair.

Today's message demands a twofold response from us. It is summarized in the reminders we heard as the ashes were sprinkled on us on Ash Wednesday. One part of our response should be that we *"repent, and believe in the Gospel"* (Mk 1:15). The other part of our response should be a profound awareness of our mortality, which leads us to open ourselves to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and permits Him to determine the direction of our lives. And for the Community, this week's directions are:

1. Cast away the ways of the world and return to a life in the Spirit.
2. Avail of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as often as possible.
3. Reflect on the passion and death of Christ to recognize the depth of our sinfulness.



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As Lent begins, we should be aware that there is evil in the world and that we have to battle against it, often within ourselves. We sin in what we've done and in what we've failed to do, in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions and in our inaction. Let's recognize Lent as a season of spiritual re-birth, a time to reflect upon our attitudes, values, concerns and goals in life. Let us make it a time to ponder how to truly and sincerely live lives of virtue. In this way, we will demonstrate our desire to repent and our wish to remain in a loving relationship with God. For the love of God is this, that we keep His commandments and trust His promises, for "He guides the humble to justice, he teaches the humble his way" (Ps 25:9).

Let us heed Jesus' call to renewal by living up to the saving waters of baptism, and cross through the wasteland of evil, go past the wild beasts of sin, and toward the rainbow of God's peace. Let us focus less on the things that we might give up, and more fervently endeavor to take up the mission of Christ. Let us direct our prayers and actions to the glory of God and the needs of our community.

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the occasion for a sin of pride and contempt for others.

Sharing: entering into the love of Christ Jesus

If the pandemic kills many people, hunger kills more. Millions of adults and children die of hunger and malnutrition every year.

The Christian shares his goods with the poor. An act of solidarity and charity, sharing links to love for the Holy Trinity, communion of divine Persons, where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one in love.

Ascent towards Easter

Prayer, fasting and sharing are interconnected and they strengthen each other. Prayer leads to penance and sharing. The alms that purifies the heart promotes prayer and penance.

Time of preparation for baptism for the catechumens who will be reborn on Easter night from the water and the Holy Spirit, Lent brings a renewal of mentalities and of the spirit as explicitly stated in the rite of Ash Wednesday: "Convert yourself and believe in the Gospel".

Conversion means "to turn around" to get away from evil and turn to God. In doing so, the seeker of God experiences the joy of God in his heart. Rising towards Easter, Lent promotes progress



Please note that a pdf of this Covenant News is also available online at BLDNEWARK.com

LORD'S PROVISION

PREVIOUS WEEK'S

Collections:	Last Week	YTD
Tithes & Love Offerings / E-Giving / Mailed Checks	\$ 1,533	\$ 14,367
Bereavement Fund	\$ -	
Mission	\$ -	



Financial details are available to all members through treasury@bldnewark.com

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Teaching Calendar

CMP 2, PART 1

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2021

@ 7:45 PM

ME 47-52 / SPE 18-21 / SE 33-38 /
2021 Discipling Class / everyone wishing to take a refresher course



The Word Ministry Is Looking for Your Reflections for Inclusion in the Covenant News!!!

Should you wish to see your compositions in a future CN issue, please email them to cez.calingo@bldnewark.com

THANK YOU!

➔ in knowledge and closeness to God.

Above all, Lent brings the good news of the vocation of every man to share the life of God through Christ Jesus, victor over death, in order to celebrate Easter Sunday before a flowered cross in the joy of the Resurrection.