

Ash Wednesday – February 14, 2018

Today we start the season of Lent. I was reading an article this morning, that only twenty-four percent of Catholics will observe Lent this year in any kind of way shape or form. Our culture has gotten us so much into having what we want, when we want it...Amazon, that we can no longer think of depriving ourselves of anything. When that happens you have a hedonistic, pagan culture, which makes Christian witness even more important. You and I are a minority in the country today and in the world. They say there are a billion Catholics but if only twenty-four percent of them are practicing, then we are not that many. So, Lent gives us a time to look into our lives, to practice the three monotheistic virtues that come from the religions founded by Abraham. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. We are able to see in our lives by using these, how much control we have over ourselves. How much of a human being we are and not an animal who gives into their passions and desires, all the time, without thought. These three things are; prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Today was a day of fasting and abstinence; no meat and very little food. I'm not going to ask who forgot, because that's up to you to remember. But, I do know that a lot of you are concerned about getting your ashes because immediately after lunch, the phone in the office did not stop ringing for eight hours. Constantly, which made it very difficult on my first day of Lent, because I had to give up my nap. Increase your prayer. We all need more prayer in our lives. We all need to talk to God more often in our lives. That's all prayer is – talking to God. It's not walking over and kneeling down by your bed or the couch in the house, and setting a time off for; I've got to say this particular prayer or this particular prayer. No. It's talking to God, anywhere anytime. Okay? Just like you're talking to anybody else. Taking a few more minutes each day and doing that. One of the ways of doing it is to give up sleep, ten or fifteen minutes, and saying some prayers. Instead of waking up and saying, "Ah, the alarm hasn't gone off yet," like I do. We can do that. Ash Wednesday, Lent, is not a time to give up food if you are an adult. It's not a time to start a diet if you're an adult. It's a time to grow closer to God, to your faith, closer to your spirituality. People giving up chocolate and peanut butter, and God knows what else. Doesn't do it for an adult. Yes, you're controlling your passions, but how is that getting you closer to Christ? How's it getting you closer to God?

How about we give up some other things? I mentioned ten or fifteen minutes of sleep. How about, give up grumbling and complaining? Wow, can you walk into a high school and see that happening? No. Give up looking and judging other peoples' worst points, judging them externally, like our media does. "Oh, if you don't have thigh gap, if you don't have all these other things, you're not good enough for society. Too bad. Like I told people earlier today, "It doesn't matter what I look like, I don't have to look at myself." Plain and simple, you do. And guess what, I don't care what you think. So, give up judging others externally. When you do that, you can't look at yourself and see what you're doing. Give up hatred of anyone or anything. Give praise to God more. Give up your worries and anxieties. This is where parents always say, "Yah Father, right, I got kids at home, sure." Give it up! Give up tv for one whole night a week. Oooh, some people go to sleep with the television at night. That's going to kill you. One night a week you're going to give up a lot of sleep, in prayer. Give up buying anything out of the essentials. Give up going to Amazon and saying, "I want this, I want that." Only buy essentials. There was a columnist from USA Today newspaper, a few years back, he said, "I'm going to try an experiment." He said, "I'm a shopaholic and I'm going to try something and write about it in the paper." He gave up buying anything new, except food and toiletries, for a whole year. He was amazed that he only needed the clothes in his closet. That he didn't need new shoes. On and on and on. Give up buying the non-essentials. Give up your cell phone for two hours a day. Take it and hand it to somebody else and say,

“No matter what I do, no matter how I threaten you, don’t give it to me until my two hours is up.” Can you see that happening? That’s something to think about. The average person in America looks at their phone, thirty-eight times a day. The average teenager, never stops. The average young adult, never stops, it’s a part of them. Give that up. Look around and go to Denny’s and say, “I’m not going to use my cell phone, I’m going to talk to the person across the table from me, instead of texting them.” All these things and remember why you’re doing it. The person you are going to be interacting with, is Jesus, in your life. That time you give, will get you closer to Christ. Because, “Ah, I can pray now, I can read a religious book, I can do all these things that I thought I could never do before.” Don’t be like my friend, down in Tucson. Every Lent, he gives up beer and makes his family miserable. They pray for the end of Lent so that Dad will be a good loving person and wonderful again. Not only that, he’s a judge. Don’t go to him during Lent.

The other thing, alms giving, giving money to charity, being more charitable. In all three religions, God says in the holy books, “Alms giving will take away venial sins.” God will take venial sins away from you, he will forgive venial sins if you give alms to charities, to people who need it. You may not know they need it but maybe you find out and you anonymously give them something.

So, we can take on more prayer. We can give up something that will truly make us interact with people more, interact with God more, we can reclaim part of our lives. And then, we can be more charitable, so that others see God in us. These are the things that we begin to think about as Lent starts. This was always the foundation for Lent. Certain groups in the Christian religion, used to have fasting 180 days a year. You couldn’t have meat and meat products, dairy products, no eggs, no bacon for breakfast. None of this stuff for 180 days. Catholics used to give up things the moment Fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras, was over. Everybody in the house would sit down and eat every piece of meat, drink all the milk, eat all the eggs, and then the rest of Lent, for forty days, you wouldn’t eat anything but vegetables and fruit. The Church has lightened up on us. But we are still called to do this. To show that we can truly be in control of ourselves and not let the world dictate how we work, how we feel, and how we do things.

God bless you,