

Sunday, February 14, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Lent

Lent is a unique spiritual opportunity offering new purpose and direction for anyone hoping to change or renew their lives. Intended primarily for Christians, it can be a motivation for people of all, or even no, faith. Everyone needs incentives for improvement.

Lent often is used in negative ways, by giving up pleasures, such as food or drink. These are temporary sacrifices which usually do not extend beyond the season. In effect, they are not very beneficial because they are too short-termed. Instead, I recommend more positive and proactive goals which may have a better chance of making a sustained difference. These goals, however, ought to be holistic, affecting our intellectual and spiritual development and not just physical or superficial enhancement. The purpose of Lent is to make us better persons, not better-looking persons. Of course, we all have undesirable habits and Lent is the opportune moment to begin to eliminate them. These habits may very well be physical habits, e.g., sloppiness, or attitudinal, such as a tendency to criticize or complain. Lent is our annual invitation to change the status quo, so we can grow beyond our deficiencies and become more attentive to the needs of others.

The primary purpose of Lent is to develop inner attributes or soul-qualities. Personally, I do not believe that the focus of Lent – or even faith itself – is an imitation of Christ. That is an exercise bound to fail because we never will be Christ. An authentic spirituality develops and draws out our own individual talents and qualities rather than copying someone else, however wonderful or famous that person may be. This may entail correcting negative tendencies which thwart personal growth and progress. Thus, in order to become more thoughtful and reasonable, we may have to enlarge our perspective and challenge our opinions. All growth requires openness. By doing this we will find new ideas more compelling and enriching. Simultaneously, if we hope to develop a more spontaneous capacity for kindness and compassion we will have to adopt an unbiased or non-judgmental attitude which expresses hope and respect. This certainly was the example of Jesus who consistently welcomed everyone. These seem worthy-enough projects for Lent that could improve our own personal lives and also positively benefit others.

Next week, we can review other approaches that may make Lent an optimum experience of grace and renewal benefiting both our environments and our personal lives. To do so, however, means treating Lent as an opportunity, not a hardship.