

Sunday, February 28, 2016  
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

## LENT

For Christians, Lent is a unique time. It invites us to do things which will have an immediate and obvious result. These Lenten practices do not have to be big. Small is probably better. They should be, however, positive, practical, and proactive. The traditional Lenten sacrifices, like giving up our favorite foods, are too negative and have little value, except to make life more difficult than it already is. Better instead to choose something reasonable, with a possibility to improve life and ourselves.

Perhaps this year, then, Lent can inspire us to do the things we often postpone. So, we can wash the dishes instead of letting them pile up. The same with the laundry. Write the long-delayed letters and thank-you notes. What's the point of postponing the necessary? It is a bad habit that Lent can help us change. Students, likewise, can do their homework and start long-term projects, instead of waiting until the last second. Important things ought to be done immediately. Just because we don't like something doesn't mean that it should be put off. Lent can help us create priorities and new patterns.

Lent also is a time to focus on others. The traditional Lenten practices too often focus on personal improvement and are not altruistic. Jesus, however, clearly indicated that goodness starts by helping others first. One valuable way of being other-focused is by volunteering. There are many opportunities to do this: by helping a neighbor or working at a local not-for-profit or religious-based organization. It could be as simple as driving someone to church or grocery shopping for another person at the same time we are doing ours. It could be teaching English to immigrants, cooking or serving meals for the hungry, volunteering at a thrift shop like Fabulous Finds, our parish shop which donates almost \$50,000 a year to senior citizens and college students. Lent is an opportunity to serve others and, as a consequence, improve our own personal lives.

Lent also is a time to tone down noise, to practice listening, and to appreciate quiet. It is inappropriate, for instance, to use bluetooth devices conducting business and personal conversations in public spaces. While I was having coffee in a downtown plaza this past week, a woman, in a loud voice, spoke on a non hand-held device for over one hour, unconcerned about disturbing everyone around her. She might as well have been playing loud music on a boom box. If we insist on making noise in a public space, let it be for the voiceless of society.