

Lent Today

We soon enter another season in the Christian Tradition, Lent. Lent brings mixed emotions for many of the faithful like, what to give up, why is it so long, why are some not allowed to marry in Lent, and more. In the 21st Century most people feel that they have very busy schedules and do not have the time any longer to enter this period of “time out”. We live in a time when many people go without enough sleep and push themselves too far too fast. The trend today is to keep moving and doing. With obesity on the rise in the era of fast foods, the idea of fasting is probably another traditional item that will not go well with today’s customs.

The concepts of meditation, slowing down, or even taking time away from any of our daily schedules is perhaps not conducive to reality for many either. All of us have formed habits in the way we function day by day and it hardly ever occurs to us that this might be a significant part of our health problems. Many will say that they cannot afford to slow down or decrease in any way. This is especially true given the economic climate for the majority. If anything they are looking for ways to increase in order to continue to survive and pay their bills.

Just maybe, if we really think about it, Lent is the very tradition we need more than anything else if we are to survive in this 21st Century. Often I have heard leaders tell us, “If you do not come apart – you will come apart”. Everyone is familiar with “R & R” (Rest and Relaxation). It seems that most people work more than one job and take very little, if any, time for themselves. With the present economy we hear that many individuals and families, especially those who are out of work, do not have enough money to take a vacation. Is it surprising that people’s worlds are falling apart? Many people may have to start over or to at least renew whom they are in order to continue and move forward.

We may think that our times are different and unusual, but looking back in history you will find that there were similar difficulties in every age that required the need for adjustment and change. The fears and frustration of life in every time have been present to a similar variety of people. Everyone, in some way, experiences the basic realities of life and today is no different. The adage is that those who do not learn from history are forced to repeat it. It might do us all well to look at the concept of Lent and adapt its importance to our 21st Century necessities for our own well being now.

A Word about God

God is often the name we use in speaking of the majestic source of Creation, the effervescent vitality of everything that is, and the mystical spirit that is the essence of life as we know it. God, in modern terms is perhaps “pure energy” or “light” – that which was, and is, and is to come. It is difficult to say, for even the Apostle Paul acknowledged, “*we now see through a glass darkly*” or in newer translations: “*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror*”.

I love the vision of God in the Hebrew Scripture when Moses encountered God in the burning bush. Moses was concerned about how he would introduce God to the people, listen: (Exodus 3:13-14) Moses said to God, “*Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?'*” God said to Moses, “*I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'*” The verb “to be” – the great “I am”! (also translated: I will be what I will be).

Before I go much further, I would like to share an interesting Scripture found in “La Sagrada Biblia” with the Imprimatur: “ANGELI, Obispo Aux. y Vic. Gen. Madrid. 4 de Julio de 1968” In this Spanish Bible I would like to share with you the first several verses from the Gospel of John.

John 1:1-3 *“En el principio era ya el Verbo, y el Verbo estaba con Dios, y el Verbo era Dios. El estaba en el principio con Dios. Por El fueron hechas todas las cosas: y sin El no se ha hecho cosa alguna de cuantas han sido hechas.”*

Here is what we normally read in the English versions:

John 1:1-3 *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”*

You will notice that in the Spanish Bible it says, *“In the beginning was the Verb, and the Verb was with God, and the Verb was God.....”* I share this with you because of its unique similarity to the name of God given to Moses in the Hebrew Scripture at the burning bush – *“I AM has sent me to you” “I am who I am”*.

The VERB “to be” in any language is “ACTIVE”. In all of the stories of God in Scripture we know that God was ACTIVE, is ACTIVE, and will be ACTIVE in our world and in our lives. This Divine “activity” is essential to all life if we are truly to be “alive”. God is much larger than the anthropomorphic picture so many people have of that old man sitting on a great throne in the skies. To experience the changes needed for wholeness and productivity in our lives we need to acknowledge and engage this power of creative activity every day.

A word about YOU:

Human Beings have a tendency to get “stuck in a rut” as they say. It is easier for us to live in the past and talk about how it used to be rather than in the present and face the realities and decisions of today. Some may spend a lot of time thinking about the future and how it might be. For many it is difficult to concentrate on moving forward – or even to move at all – because we become so comfortable with where we are. We feel safer in inactivity than when we become actively involved in something new and different. Change is scary for most people and their tendency is to resist change in their life situation.

Could this be why we find it uncomfortable to be in the presence of God? God is “ACTIVE”. God’s real name is “I will be what I will be” and that is scary for us. Moses was not only “sent” to his people and on behalf of his people he was “sent” before Pharaoh. Can you imagine how afraid he was in all this “activity”? What if Moses reneged and gave up? What happens to us if we refuse to change and move forward?

Are you aware of the fact that nothing stays the same? If anyone thinks that we can keep things the way they are is grossly mistaken. Everything and everyone is always changing – for better or worse! In the Universe stars die and other stars are born. Our own planet Earth is not the same as it was because of erosion, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, drought and many other events. Even the Milk commercial has reminded us that “there’s a new you coming every day”. Through aging alone we should know that we are changing every moment of each day. The beauty of our humanity is that we do have some control in regard to change. We may not be able to prevent death and

taxes, but we can do a lot to prolong our lives in a healthy way and find the loopholes that may diminish the tax we have to pay.

As human beings and part of this marvelous creation we have an integral part in the course of events. It seems obvious that we have the abilities to literally move mountains and bring dignity and healing to our world in many ways. Through neglect and inactivity we know that we can allow things to deteriorate and fall apart. Maybe this is what Jesus was trying to tell us in words recorded in John 14:12, *"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."* When we are active and instigate positive change as the people of God we join in creating things that were neither possible nor plausible in the time of Jesus.

A word about LENT today:

It is not unusual for people to say things like, maybe I need to get moving on this, or I need to reorganize, or I want to rethink where I am going. We often say how busy we are with hardly any time to stop, look, or listen. Perhaps the tradition of Lent makes more sense now when our lives are moving at top speed from those not too long ago when people really lived at a slower pace; when there was no electricity and sleep was about all you could do when it got dark; when there were no cars or mass transit and getting from one place to another took days.

We still only have 365 days in a year but we can manage to pack much more activity in them and, without a vacation or sufficient time off, literally have burn out in body, mind, and emotion. Perhaps Lent can provide a time for us to have an excuse to slow down and refresh and renew our lives.

Traditionally Lent is 40 days. There are many things in history, math, and science that use the number forty. I am sure you have heard of the "back forty", the portion farthest from the settler's dwelling, or the forty-yard dash. It is also true that the number forty is significant in Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and other Middle Eastern Traditions. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/40_\(number\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/40_(number))] Rain fell for forty days and nights during Noah's flood, Israel wandered for forty years in the desert, Jesus was presented in the Temple forty days after his birth, and Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness before his temptation. There are many more examples of the use of forty in a variety of stories in these Middle Eastern Traditions.

I am sure that forty days is not essential in the point I am trying to make for our human benefit of wholeness and well being, but the absolute need for taking regular time for "R & R" is a must! All the professionals that are concerned with our health in body, mind, and emotion proclaim it loudly and persistently. It is clear today that it is essential for everyone, for much more than forty days, to have a good diet with exercise, meditation, enough sleep, time with family and friends, along with other intentional things in a consistent and regular manner.

I like acronyms because I find them helpful to simplify or clarify a point and I hope you will find this helpful too. LENT - **L**etting **E**verything (be) **N**ewly **T**ransformed. Now you may see why I threw in that lesson on the version in the Spanish Bible and the story of Moses and the burning bush.

Letting: God does not force – God encourages and asks us to "let go and let God" as some have said.

Everything: Nothing can be exempt from God's activity in our lives if we are to succeed.

(be) (God at work)

Newly: Yesterday was – let it go. Tomorrow is not here – it will come. Work on TODAY – expect and welcome CHANGE!

Transformed: *“meaning to change... a : to change in composition or structure b : to change the outward form or appearance of c : to change in character or condition”* (for further description see) [<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transform>] Transformation is dying to that which is old and awakening to something new. New life is not only in the future, it is essential in each moment of any TODAY in our lives. New life comes each time we, in the Name of God (God at work) “Let Everything (be) Newly Transformed!

Lent is much more about and becoming who we really are and what we were meant, “to be” – the active verb in living. Lent is the bringing together of all life’s possibilities to help us unify all the seeming separate facets of living. Mystics of various Religious traditions have always encouraged us to gather and bring together all the ideas and energies that are available to us for an abundant life. While no one can explain God, everyone can experience the transforming energy of God’s presence in our lives. Christian Mystics encourage us not to be confused by the mystery and myths that are used to try and examine the holy activity of the Divine. We speak of our humanity as being body, mind, and spirit and yet we do not assume that we can totally separate nor completely define each category. So too with the Trinity of God, traditionally known as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Today we might speak of the Trinity as Creator, Liberator, and life giving Spirit as demonstrated by this hymn used in some Eucharistic worship after the Great Thanksgiving:

Source of life, by you and through you all things exist.
Source of Love, salvation is proclaimed in Jesus Christ.
Source of Peace, your spirit brings serenity to all.

Learn to **LIVE**, **L**etting **E**verything (be) **N**ewly **T**ransformed!
Don’t miss a Holy Lent – in season and out of season whenever you can.