

Column030120

Companions on the Journey

March 1, 2020

Dear Friends,

Well, you knew it was coming and so here it is. Lent 2020. It begins this week. Ash Wednesday is the traditional beginning of Lent. The date for Ash Wednesday changes each year. It has to do with the way the Feast of Easter is calculated in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. Spring arrives Thursday, March 19th. The way the Church calculates the exact date of Easter each year is by beginning with the vernal equinox (the actual date of spring) and then identifying the first full moon after the vernal equinox and then identifying the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox.

This year there is a full moon on April 6th. The first Sunday after that is April 12th. Voila! Easter Sunday. Now that we have identified why Lent is beginning on a different date each year let's think about what spiritual practices we want to engage in this year. The key areas of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We should each take on one small Lenten practice in each area. I no longer eat sweets because of my diabetes but I do enjoy nuts and so this year I will refrain from eating any kind of nuts for the forty days of Lent. That will help with the fasting side of things. But there are other fasts. How about fasting from television? Limiting your TV watching to no more than one hour each day. What about fasting from March Madness? Talk about a big Lenten fast! How about Video Game fasting? How about fasting from interrupting another person in conversation? Especially at home.

Giving alms. The concept is very simple. I have. Maybe I don't have a lot but I do have. That person does not. I am to give some of what I have to help that person—to the degree I am able. If I am ever downtown and see a homeless person I try to remember to put some one dollar bills in my pocket folded in four. If I encounter someone who is begging I give them a few bucks and silently say a prayer for them. Might just make their day—just to be noticed, just to have someone help them. Probably doesn't happen much. Give to someone who asks from you that you are not inclined to give to. Feel the sacrifice. Pick a charity and give to it—a little more than you are prepared to give. Feel the not having those extra dollars in your wallet or your purse. Anticipate meeting someone who is in need and have something ready at hand to give them. Like in your car. Giving of your time to someone is true almsgiving because our time has become ever more valuable. Take the time to be with.

Pray. Pray more than you typically do. Pray with more mindfulness and more attentiveness than you typically do. Aim your prayer for a particular person's intention. You can include yourself in that increased prayer. Sometimes we ourselves are in need of some additional prayer support. Jesus doesn't distinguish. He says only: "Ask and you shall receive." The problem is that we often do not really take the time to ask.

We think that because we hold something in our hearts that that means we are asking for it. That is not the case. Any child knows that wanting something for Christmas and holding it in his or her heart is not at all the same as asking for that something. Kids definitely know how to ask even to the point of nagging. If kids can tell the difference, then we can too. Ask. Ask and mean it. Ask more than once. Ask and keep asking. Do you want to be set free of some compulsion or addiction? Ask and keep asking until you are free. Don't be afraid to ask for someone you love if not yourself. It's Lent why not?

And one more thing. If you stumble on one or more of your Lenten penances don't give up. Start anew and rededicate yourself. You can still have a good Lent even if it isn't a perfect Lent.

Peace,

Msgr. McHenry