

Did you ever notice how time seems to slow down during the most meaningful moments of life? We may drive home without remembering a single portion of a 30-minute trek through traffic; someone accustomed to the kitchen may fix dinner hardly noticing the particulars she tends to in pre-heating, seasoning, chopping and putting a casserole in the oven. Yet, when we are standing at the bedside of a dying parent, attending the birth of a child or asking the question that will lead to a life-long decision, each second seems to have its own import as our feelings blend with sensual perceptions and create enduring memories. It is as if time's duration comes with variable thickness or weight.

Mark tells the story of Jesus and the man with leprosy with moment-enhancing emotion. Perhaps it is because Jesus had just told his disciples that going out among the people was the very reason for which he had come. Perhaps Mark knew the man in question and had reminisced about the story with him. Maybe it was just that Mark had discovered that the time of Jesus' life overflowed with moments of profound meaning and Mark dedicated himself to communicating them. For whatever motive, Mark tells this story in evocative detail.

When the leper came to Jesus, he was doing something forbidden. He must have been at least a little frightened. Instead of respecting the law that relegated him to the margins of society, he knelt down in front of Jesus as to one who not only had the power to help him, but who could also exercise the freedom to do what the law would not and could not do: to accept and heal rather than banish him.

Speaking with the audacity of someone who has no other options, the man summoned Jesus to reveal what he was all about: "If you wish, you can make me clean." The man had no question about whether Jesus could accomplish the feat, only whether Jesus wanted to do so, whether he would choose it as part of the mission for which he had come.

According to Mark, the man's request stirred Jesus to his depths. Even before he could speak, his hand was reaching out, touching the man's spurned and suffering body, transforming it with tenderness. Then pronouncing the words that explained his gesture and made his

will effective, Jesus said, "I do will it. Be made clean."

With that, Jesus commissioned the healed man as the first apostle to the leaders of the Jews: "Go, show yourself to the priest ... offer what Moses prescribed; that will be proof." Whether the man got to the priests, we do not know, but he did not follow Jesus' order to keep quiet with others. His story made Jesus the man of the moment and took away any hope of anonymity. If he did not go to the towns, they came to him.

What gave this story its "thickness" was the man's vulnerable openness and honesty and Jesus' spontaneous tenderness. The man knew his own need like no one else, and he was willing to expose it. While society refused to countenance him, he found in Jesus someone who had no fear of contamination or mortality. The afflicted man's audacity met Jesus' utter freedom to love and that combination proclaimed the Gospel in the sight of the people.

It is a beautiful story. But, what does it tell those who do not suffer from leprosy? First of all, the story calls us to a recognition of all that we share with the leper. Since his condition was obvious, society ordered him to hide away from sight. We, on the other hand, are quite adept at hiding our weakness and the unsightly, sinful aspects of our life. Perhaps the worst of it is that we can hide them from ourselves, believing in the image we project rather than the truth of who we are. Our friend the one-time leper would remind us that Christ can only touch and heal what we bring before him; if we don't bring our genuine self, we will never truly encounter

Christ. He might add that we never hear of Jesus reaching out and touching someone who was self-sufficient, but only those who knew they needed him.

Coming before God with a willingness to be nothing other than ourselves and to expose our need will take us into the realm of thick time. We may do that in private prayer, in sacrament or with a community. Mark told the story in a way that points out that the time and place do not matter. What is vital is the courage to place our truest self before God as well as the vulnerability to allow God to touch and transform us. Whether we ask for healing or forgiveness or inspiration, we can trust what Jesus said: "I do will it!"

May God's will be done!

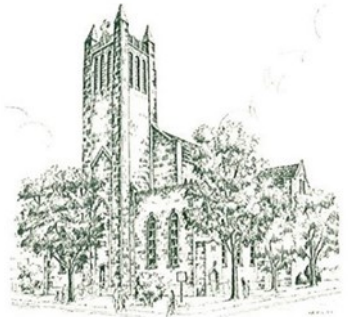
*By Mary M. McGlone, CSJ, Celebration Publications*



*A new heart I will give you, and a*

# NEW SPIRIT

*I will put within you. Ez. 36:26a*



**LENT**  
**CELEBRATIONS**  
**ASH WEDNESDAY**  
**FEBRUARY 14**

12 NOON  
EUCCHARIST/ASHES

7:30 P.M.  
LITURGY OF THE WORD/ASHES

**RECONCILIATION SERVICES**

FEBRUARY 24—11:00 A.M.  
FEBRUARY 27—7:30 P.M.

## WHY LENT?

Lent as we know it was not always a part of the liturgical year in the Church. In the early years, those who were preparing for Initiation at Easter spent some time in prayer, reflection and discernment preparing for Baptism and membership in the community of faith. Those already baptized were exhorted to pray for the elect as they prepared for Easter. Gradually those already baptized began to spend some time before Easter preparing to renew their own baptismal commitment along with those preparing for baptism. In memory of Jesus' forty days in the desert before he began his public ministry, Christians spent forty days in prayer, with fasting and almsgiving as a way of preparing to celebrate Easter and to renew their baptismal commitment.

While Lent has a definite penitential flavour and tone, we are invited to view Lent in a positive rather than a negative way. We are invited to do penance (in the form of fasting and almsgiving), but we are also challenged to reach out in charity and to imitate Jesus in serving our sisters and brothers. Fasting helps us free resources to share with others. We are challenged to look at other ways that we can reach out—through forgiveness, seeking reconciliation, offering the gift of time and presence ... use your imagination!

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**ASH WEDNESDAY**  
**FEBRUARY 14**  
**LENT BEGINS!**

## THIS LENT: "GIVE IT UP FOR THE EARTH"

For me, Lent's attraction is not the focus on suffering or deprivation as much as the call to be lured back to attitudes and behaviours that prepare us to become an Easter people. Returning to more disciplined schedules of prayer, renewal of our observance of the sacraments, penance, self-denial and almsgiving – all have heightened relevance at this time.

Pope Francis (in 2014) reminded us not to practice a formal fast just to feel good about ourselves. "Fasting makes sense if it questions our security, and also if it leads to some benefit for others," he said. Lenten observances can be strictly private, but the best practices can certainly have salutary public benefits, as well.

Citizens for Public Justice's Lenten campaign may be a helpful illustration of this. More than 100 congregations and schools across Canada have already agreed to participate in Give It Up for the Earth! in Lent 2018. Give It Up for the Earth! runs from Ash Wednesday (February 14<sup>th</sup>) to Holy Thursday (March 29<sup>th</sup>.) St. Joe's will engage parishioners in this campaign on the first weekend of Lent. Alternatively, you can pledge to participate as an individual, on-line, at <http://cpj.ca/pledge>

The intent of this Lenten campaign is to allow a Christian's most strongly-held faith beliefs to move into alignment with one's personal practices, as well as our environmental and political postures. Participants in Give It Up for the Earth! fill in a card, noting the personal actions they will take to care for God's creation during the next 40 days.

The first question most of us ask ourselves on Ash Wednesday is what might I "give up" for Lent? If we reframe the question to reflect what we should "give up" for the Earth, we might decide to drive less, not eat meat some days, buy organic or local food, cut waste and excess packaging, use less electricity – the options are almost endless for North American consumer action. Catholics might define Give It Up for the Earth! as a privileged way to make Francis' encyclical letter on the environment, *Laudato Si*, come alive. Each of us could examine our consciences and ask, "Have I reduced my own environmental footprint since June 2015 when I first heard of the pope's impassioned environmental plea? Have I acted to decrease my greenhouse gas emissions, given the climate change crisis? Can I expect my neighbours, industries or governments to change their behaviour if, on my part, I hesitate to live differently?"

Wendell Berry, the American novelist, environmentalist and farmer, has re-written the Golden Rule (Matthew

7:12) of the Bible with his motto for our days: "Do unto others downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you."

However important individual actions may be however, they will never be enough, on their own, to reverse environmental decline. The problem is one of scale – and time. We've organized our industries, transportation systems, buildings and infrastructures as if there was no tomorrow, and these structures are hard to change. Yet, change them we must, and change them we can.

Participants in 2018's Give It Up for the Earth! activity are also invited to tear off a card, sign it, and return it as an advocacy tool directed to the federal government. The card urges Ottawa to "end all subsidies to the fossil fuel sector right away."

Why is this activity the target of this year's campaign? In short, if you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is to stop digging.

In fact, both the former Conservative and the current Liberal governments have already promised to end these subsidies – but by the year 2025 (that is, at least two elections hence!) Even after Canada committed to meet the climate change goals of the 2015 Paris Accord, our greenhouse gas emissions have yet to decrease. And the International Institute for Sustainable Development indicates that the Government of Canada continues to provide approximately \$1.6 billion in subsidies to the oil and gas industry every year – nearly four times more than what is given to clean energy! Thus, Canada's progress towards a clean environment is being undermined by unnecessarily subsidizing the very industries that are fueling the problem.

The beauty of the Give It Up for the Earth! campaign is that Christian participants are asked to change their personal lifestyles as well as reform one of those unfortunate public policies that structurally supports ecological destruction. Our actions toward "personal greening" prepare us for the deep social and economic changes that our children's future will require, sends market signals to companies trying to attract our consumer dollars, and can lower carbon pollution. Importantly, were Christian communities to become living examples of environmental responsibility, our ability to encourage governments to accelerate necessary social change would be immeasurably enhanced.

This Lent, St. Joe's invites you to Give It Up for the Earth!

*By Joe Gunn, As published in the Prairie Messenger*

## BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

*Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. —Matthew 5:7*

I believe with all my heart that mercy and forgiveness are the whole Gospel. The Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79) says we'll have knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sin (1:77). The experience of forgiveness or mercy is the experience of a magnanimous God who loves out of total gratuitousness. There's no tit for tat. Grace isn't for sale. That is the symbolism of Jesus kicking over the tables in the temple. One cannot buy God by worthiness, by achievement, by obeying commandments. Salvation is God's loving-kindness, a loving-kindness that is "forever." Read Psalm 136 for an ecstatic description of God's faithful mercy.

More than something God does now and then, mercy is *who-God-is*. According to Jesus, "Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13; 12:7). The word used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures is *chesed*, "the steadfast, enduring love which is unbreakable." Sometimes it is translated as "loving-kindness" or "covenant love." God has made a covenant with creation and will never break the divine side of the covenant. The covenant is only broken from our side. *God's love is steadfast. It is written in the divine image within us.* We are the ones who instead clutch at our sins and beat ourselves instead of surrendering to the divine mercy. Refusing to be forgiven is a form of pride. It's saying, "I'm better than mercy. I'm only going to accept it when I'm worthy and can preserve my so-called self-esteem." Only the humble person, the little one, can live *in* and *after* mercy.

The mystery of forgiveness is God's ultimate entry into powerlessness. Withholding forgiveness is a form of power over another person, a way to manipulate, shame, control, and diminish another. God in Jesus refuses all such power.

If Jesus is the revelation of what's going on inside the eternal God (see Colossians 1:15), which is the core of the Christian faith, then we are forced to conclude that God is very humble. This God never seems to hold rightful claims against us. Abdicating what we thought was the proper role of God, this God has thrust all our sins

behind his back" (see Isaiah 38:17). We do not attain anything by our own holiness but by ten thousand surrenders to mercy. A lifetime of received forgiveness allows us to *become* mercy: That's the Beatitude. We become what we receive, what we allow into our hearts. Mercy becomes our energy and purpose. Perhaps we are finally enlightened and free when we can both receive it and give it away—without payment or punishment.



*Adapted from Richard Rohr with John Bookser Feister, [Jesus' Plan for a New World: The Sermon on the Mount](#)*



### LENTEN DAY OF REFLECTION MARCH 24, 2018

You are invited to a Day of Reflection on the theme **Contemplation and Dark Night of the Soul** at St. Isidore's Parish Hall, 1135 March Road, Kanata, on Saturday, March 24 from 9:30-3:30. Doors open at 9:00 a.m.

All spiritual growth towards holiness and wholeness involves a passing through this critical threshold of a 'dark night of the soul' experience. Trust that your dark night or impasse crisis will always press you forward, rather than backward. The dark night is radical and irreversible.

Pay attention to your story as it unfolds. Your life is the place where God encounters your deepest self and lures you into Divine union. Many times, it's a sudden, uninvited event that precipitates the emergence of a dark night: a serious illness, a disruption in a personal relationship, failure in some undertaking, a moral lapse, or a persecution attack. Large or small, the impact of the event, catapults the person into a new state of being.

Presenter: Sr. Rosemary O'Toole, CSJ assisted by spiritual directors from The Upper Room. Cost is \$15.00 at the door. Includes lunch and new book.

To register, please contact St. Isidore's Parish Office as soon as possible: Phone 613-592-1961 or email the Office at [office@stisidorekanata.com](mailto:office@stisidorekanata.com)