

When we enter the season of lent too many miss the underlining significance of what the purpose and focus is all about. The giving up of candy, cigarettes or other trite nuances is a useless exercise; similar to new year resolutions which are for show and rarely followed through. They may be fine for children; but they are not adequate for adults.

Symbolically we enter a period of forty days of preparation for a new beginning to strengthen our will power by trial. It took forty days of the flood to prepare Noah for a new beginning. It took forty years of struggle and wandering in the desert for the Israelites to begin a new life. It took forty days of sack cloth and ashes for the citizens of Nineveh to respond to the call of Jonah to repent. Elijah survived for forty days in the desert on a loaf of breads and a jug of water as he sought God at Mount Horeb. Jesus was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit for forty days to prepare physically for His ministry. Although Jesus was true God and true man, His humanity was just like ours except He was free of all sin. Thus His humanity was to be tested, not His divinity. After having been physically weakened by fasting and other hardships of desert survival, Satan tempted Jesus to use His power [His divinity] to overcome His weakened human condition. By overcoming His weakened physical condition Jesus revealed the strength of His true human character. Satan always attacks when we are at our weakest time and our defenses are down.

The first temptation was to use His divinity to provide ordinary material needs, bread. This was not to deny bread if it were supplied by ordinary means. The second temptation was to provide proof of His divinity by tempting Jesus to prove God is all powerful. Throw yourself down from this height; for it is written that the angels would not permit you to stub your toe! The third temptation is suggestive of Satan's supposed authority over the world. [prince of this world] There is no need for you to suffer and die for mankind when I can give them to you by simply admitting that I am your god. [Satan has no power in this world except that which sinners give him; this is to worship a false god.] These same temptations plague us today in one form or another.

The desert is a perpetual reminder of the reality of life's dangers, hardships and death. Sin is a spiritual desert. Wars are a moral desert. Greed and selfishness are deserts of isolation. Sloth is a desert of the mind. Deceit is a desert of character. Denial of God is a desert of the soul. To loose one's way in the desert is certain death. This reminds us of our dependency upon God to lead us through the desert; for with God we are not alone and never deserted. These forty days of lent are meant to strengthen our weaknesses through prayer and self denial; to develop stamina for the trials of this life. By overcoming the temptations, Jesus is enabled to assist those who are tempted, as we are in every respect. God will not let us be tempted beyond our abilities. If we fail it is because we revel in our short comings.

There can't be any hard and fast rules concerning the discipline of lent as each individual faces different trials and challengers to be overcome. The first consideration is my own short comings. What do I recognize in me that needs to be improved? Secondly do I have the will to do something about it? The first ingredient to get started is prayer. The second is to develop an appreciation of the suffering and sacrifice Jesus made for love of us. Third is to overcome our indifference and realize we are all sinners. [you can never really enjoy the success of the party unless you worked to prepare for it.] You can never fully enjoy Easter unless you worked to prepared for it. Preparation for lent is about improving the things of every day life that need change. This takes courage as it requires a certain amount of suffering to conquer self. We are required to do something meaningful to fully develop our will power. and express our love of God. We need to trust in God to lead us through the desert.

Ashes are an outward sign of our wandering in that desert of mortal life. They remind us of our human weaknesses and mortality. [Remember man that you are dust and unto dust you shall return.] Ashes are a sign of humility and our dependence upon God as He leads us through our personal desert to new life. They are a mark of sorrow for our sins as we are once again signed with the seal of his cross on our brow. The sign of the cross on our brow is our admission that we believe God stands with us; but the question is "DO WE STAND WITH GOD?" We have forty days in the desert of lent to discern the answer.

PEACE!