

4th Sunday of Lent “A Mid-Lent Checkup”

Bishop Frank Schuster

Can you believe that this Sunday marks the 26th day we have been journeying through the season of Lent? What this means is: we now have 21 days until Easter Sunday. We are over halfway through our journey into the desert with Jesus in this season dedicated to prayer, penance and almsgiving. I don't know about you, but I remember the enthusiasm I had on Ash Wednesday as we began this journey. It is only natural about a month into this pilgrimage to find our feet dragging a bit. This Sunday marks a good moment to consider how we are doing and what we could be doing with the time we have left before celebrating the joy of Easter Sunday.

Our Gospel reading is from the third chapter of Saint John. Nicodemus is meeting Jesus during the night which tells us that at this point in his spiritual journey he is still a seeker. It is interesting that the last time we encounter Nicodemus in the Gospel is during the day with Joseph of Arimathea overseeing Jesus' burial following his crucifixion. By this time, he had become a true disciple. Here in the third chapter, he is still seeking. Jesus explains to Nicodemus the reason why he will be crucified. Jesus said to Nicodemus: “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” The Gospel continues, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

And this is very Good News. In fact, this is the best news any soul born into this world can ever hear. However, Jesus also says something about our world that is frustratingly all too true. The Gospel says, “This is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light.” I mention this because, at this point in the season of Lent, if we are wondering why our Lenten promises are harder now than they were at the beginning or why we may have given up on our Lenten practice altogether, this is the reason. There is something within each of us that frustratingly prefers darkness to light. This Sunday we have an opportunity to recommit ourselves to the fight.

We recommit ourselves because Lent is leading us to Easter, the highest and holiest feast day on the Church's calendar, and rightfully so. It is the day we remember our salvation. It is a celebration of light triumphing over darkness. However, the curious thing about feast days is that there is really no such thing as a feast unless we first know how to fast. Lent serves as a spiritual school in this regard because if we never fast, how can we ever know what it means to truly feast in the way the bible speaks of feasting?

We therefore have an opportunity today to seriously consider whatever goal we set before ourselves at the beginning of this journey. Do I need to make a course correction, perhaps adding to my Lenten penance an additional goal that I know would be worthwhile pursuing? Could I be reading a little more scripture each day? Could I be dedicating myself to more prayer each day? Could I be a little more generous to the poor or marginalized each day? Could I be cutting back more on simple pleasures so to remind myself of what is important each day? It could also be the case that the original penance I had in mind was unrealistic. Is it time for me to settle on a goal

that is more doable each day? We should be careful though with this train of thought however because when it comes to Lent, like any other activity, we get out of it what we put into it.

I think this is an important piece to remember because Lent is also supposed to be a season of purification and enlightenment. At 26 days in, we can ask ourselves: am I being purified? Am I being enlightened? Or am I preferring darkness over the light? These are good questions to ask ourselves anytime during the year, but especially so during the season of Lent. This Sunday, we are challenged to regain our bearings because Easter Sunday is closer now than when we started. We are challenged to recommit ourselves to following Jesus who alone is the light of the world.