

Pastor's Corner - March 6, 2011 - Called to be Desert People

Apology & clarification: I need to apologize for having left the wrong impression or/and for having used ambiguous wording. In order to avoid possible confusion and misinterpretation I need to affirm that the leaders of the RCIA program have been these past few years and are still Janet and Tom Moir. The Parish, and I in particular, owe them much gratitude for having taken on this important ministry.

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of our Lenten journey as desert people. The desert is a place where we face ourselves and see things as they really are, where, like Jesus, we are tempted. C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), known today because of the film Narnia, but really a well-known author and Christian apologist who wrote those wonderful little books like "Miracles", "The Screwtape Letters", "Surprised by Joy", "The Problem of Pain", said in "Mere Christianity" that only good people can know a great deal about temptation. He said that bad people know very little about temptation because only the good, who try to resist temptation, know its strength: "after all, you find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down!" Those who too quickly yield to temptation never learn to deal with it because they have never attempted to put up a struggle. Lewis suggested that because Jesus was the only man who never gave in to temptation, he is the only man who knew to the full what temptation means: "Christ is the only complete realist!"

Jesus, the Good and the true Realist, the new Moses who gives us a new law which fulfills the old, is the one we need to turn to as we walk along the road and make our daily choices for or against evil. We are not born with sin and sin is not hereditary; after all, human beings have been created in goodness by a good and loving God. But we are constantly tempted and contaminated by a world, by an environment that knows evil by name. At the same time, evil is not unavoidable; no one is forced to choose it. We can freely choose to do what is evil, and when we do, there is no one to blame except ourselves. We cannot blame Adam and Eve, we cannot even blame original sin. "The devil made me do it" cannot be our excuse! To the question of how come evil exists, someone wrote a very brief response: "Dear Sir, I am. Yours faithfully, G.K. Chesterton." Chesterton understood that the responsibility for the existence of evil lies in the face that looks back at me from the mirror.

Jesus is the example for us of someone who was born in the same world and environment as we but who used his free will to overcome evil and not give into it. Jesus is an example to us of someone who faced the same world of evil as we, and yet did not allow himself to be contaminated by it. Jesus is someone who refused to allow another to replace God in his life.

How did Jesus do that? By constantly trusting and relying only on God and God's Word. In that Word and in his relationship with God, he found the strength he needed to stand up to evil and not to be influenced by it. He took responsibility for himself and much more. After all, he also took on the responsibility of all of us and all our sinning.

Lent is the time when we follow Jesus' example and take on responsibility for ourselves, our thoughts and our words, for what we have done and, most important, for what we have failed to do. Lent is the time when we seek out and reclaim our true self, the way, deep within our hearts, we truly wish to be and the way God wishes us to be. Lent is the time to turn from the path of least resistance, and to truly face and overcome our temptations, and thereby grow and move towards maturity. At the end of our Lenten journey is Easter, when we become Easter people, when we have met the test, overcome temptation and completed the journey with Jesus from death to life.

Come this Wednesday, receive the ashes on your forehead and the grace of strength given to us in Jesus, and let us together as a desert people begin our Lenten journey towards Easter and life!

Shalom!

Fr. Rolf