

Theology on Tap Hill Country
“Preparing for Lent”
February 12, 2018

Our most powerful image for Lent has always been Jesus’ 40 day walk into the desert. We also remember Israel’s 40 year journey through the wilderness on the way to the promised land. We remember Jesus being marched through the streets of Jerusalem with the Cross, or Peter following the crowd during Jesus’ trial. All of these images are images of a journey. We don’t just sit around during Lent. We walk through Lent with the Lord. In a couple of days we will start this journey anew, so let’s take some time to prepare ourselves to start the season well.

“Lent summons us, and enables us, to come back to the Lord wholeheartedly and in every aspect of our life.” These are the words of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his Lenten Message this year. Our Lenten journey is not leading us just anywhere, it should lead us back to the Lord. This means of course that we stay on the right track through the wilderness. For ensure that we are walking closer to the Lord, we have to be following the Lord. This makes sense, doesn’t it? But Pope Francis reminds us that sometimes we are misled by “false prophets” who distract us from our goal of true and fruitful conversion. As the Pope says, “they can appear as ‘snake charmers’, who manipulate human emotions in order to enslave others and lead them where they would have them go.” Let’s take some time and look at some of these false prophets that try and lead us along the wrong path.

We are warned against following the “dream of wealth, which only makes [us] slaves to profit and petty interests.” Money is a tool in life, not an end in itself. The economy is not a measure of human success and

flourishing. Money is necessary in our society, this is certain, but too many mistake their bank balance for their personal worth.

Pope Francis warns against the “charlatans” who offer simple but ultimately useless solutions to life’s pressures. He calls back all who are trapped by drugs, by “disposable relationships”, and by “easy but dishonest gains.” He urges change for those who “are ensnared in a thoroughly ‘virtual’ existence, in which relationships appear quick and straightforward, only to prove meaningless. These swindlers, in peddling things that have no real value, rob people of all that is most precious: dignity, freedom and the ability to love.”

These false prophets guide us away from the Lord, and lead us to have “cold hearts.” This is what leads to the throwaway culture that Pope Francis has constantly denounced. “All this leads to violence against anyone we think is a threat to our own ‘certainties’: the unborn child, the elderly and infirm, the migrant, the alien among us, or our neighbor who does not live up to our expectations.” These are strong words from our Holy Father, but they are so important to us as we enter this Lenten season.”

So, I want you all to take some time right now and think about what the false prophets are in your own lives. What are those things that turn you away from God, and lead you trust in your “own certainties?” What parts of the teaching of the Church have you struggled with? What difficult things is God calling you to in life that you have been avoiding? Take some time now and let the Holy Spirit guide your heart and mind.

* Pause for reflection time *

We do not have to be afraid of these false prophets, my sisters and brothers. We just have to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, and he will lead us through the desert to a deeper relationship with him. He is the one that

called us on this journey to begin with! He loves us, and he has given us the Lenten Season specifically to walk with us through the conversion of our hearts, our minds, our souls, our relationships, and our lives. He also gives us tools to help us along the journey.

We most certainly have the sacraments. Go to reconciliation, my friends. If you go regularly, take a friend with you during this blessed season. If you have not been in a while, then this is God's message to you today: the time has come to go to the sacrament of forgiveness and mercy! That is what waits for you in confession. Attend Mass very regularly during Lent – daily if you can. Make the sacrifice of time! Conversion in Christ is supposed to take effort. Reject the false prophet of ease or comfort – seek the Lord with everything that you are, there is nothing more important you can do in a day.

We also have the great disciplines of Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Do you pray every day – and I mean every day? This is not an option for Christians. It is okay if you are not there right now, but this Lent is the time to change that. If you don't know how to pray, ask someone who does. You have plenty of good examples right here around you. Ask your priest, a religious sister, a prayerful family member. At its core, prayer is spending time in communication with God. Just start, and God will guide you in your relationship with him. Go to adoration, pray a rosary, a litany, a novena. There are so many wonderful ways to pray. **Make** the time to learn more about prayer. The Holy Spirit lives within you, and you were made to pray!

Fasting helps us to see the world as it is. We deny ourselves what our body or heart wants, not to hurt ourselves, but to help us see what is truly important. We certainly fast, as well as abstain from meat, on Ash

Wednesday and Good Friday, but take up a deeper Lenten fast of some kind. It will silence the false prophets trying to lead you astray.

Finally, we have almsgiving. This one is probably the least utilized. In the United States, we have a twisted relationship with money and possessions. Many of you are students or just starting out in careers, so you do not have a lot of money to give. But you do still go get that cup of coffee or take that night out with your friends. Sacrifice those things and give that money to those who have less than you do. Our love and efforts for the poor are not optional as Christians. How we care for the poor flows out of our love for God, and the two are connected. Scripture is filled with this message, and Lent is a time to renew our commitment to the poor and marginalized among us.

With these tools to help us, we will keep our eyes fixed on the Lord during our journey through the wilderness of Lent, my friends. Do not be afraid of the challenges, because we do not face them alone. God is with us, and the Church is with us. All these wonderful brothers and sisters here are with us. We are united as a Church and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit! May we make this journey together, and draw closer to the God who loves us.