

## **Clergy Forum: Lent is a time to make all things right**

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Whittier Daily News

Posted: 03/10/2011 03:03:56 PM PST

The elderly person with whom I spoke in the hospital told me when I reminded her Lent started Wednesday:

"Ah, father, it's not like it used to be - I remember ..."

And 10 minutes later I realized she was giving me a lesson on what I should have remembered but with the passing of time I either forgot or chose to forget the true meaning of Lent.

Most of you know about Lent, most of you have experienced what the elderly person was speaking about and most of you know only too well how easy it is to make a promise but how terribly difficult it is to stay with it.

If you were challenged today to remember what it was that made a particular Lent special for you in the past could you honestly say what it was, do you remember the hardships people endured, or were you too young?

The concept of a fast day or the thought of a day of abstinence caused most of us some anxiety - anxiety lest we died of hunger because we did something special for the holy season. Look around. We are all here and none of us looks as though we are under-nourished!

Lent makes demands upon all of us as Christians, but then it is supposed to be a time of penance and fasting. It is also a time to be forgiving and to share our love and gifts with our family, our friends, even our enemies, too, and the less privileged.

The gospel today sets a very high standard for all of us: loving our enemy, loving our neighbor, treating others and we would want them to treat us - in other words BEING COMPASSIONATE, like God himself.

We don't need reminding that it is normal for those who oppose Christianity to point at our failure to live up to those standards. We don't need people to point to our shortcomings or our inadequacies - God knows we know them only too well.

In some respects what our Holy Father John Paul II did in his advancing years in canonizing and beatifying so many new saints was to say, "There are many who do live up to what is expected from all of us!" We can all be like that if we have a mind to. We all have the capabilities to be saints if we put our mind to it.

What Jesus is really saying to you and to me is very simple: always aim high, be compassionate and always grant forgiveness.

There should be no room in our heart for grudges; be sincere in your dealings with others; do not pretend to love God and spurn your enemy. The only way to make the work place a better place or the world a safer place is to listen to what Jesus tells us.

Make this Lent the best one ever - be constant and be diligent about what you want to do and you will look back come Easter and be able to say truthfully, "I'm a better person."

To parents, one of your Lenten gifts to God might be time spent in reading some Bible stories each evening to your young children and to encourage your older siblings to read for themselves.

Take your Bible down and leave it around the house - buy some reading material that you know will benefit all of them.

One day you will be that elderly person who I met in the hospital and, who knows, you will be saying the exact same things she said. "Ah, father it's not like it used to be."

Let's hope and pray it will be a better time and a far better place than we found it.

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