



Thoughts For Lent

The New Taboo

By FATHER ALFRED MCBRIDE

A nationally known theologian, Father Alfred McBride has worked on the development of the National Catechetical Directory.

Mark Twain once said, "The only thing I have never been able to resist is temptation." Similar to this is the contention that the best way to handle temptation is to give in to it. These light approaches to temptation point to a nervousness about admitting the possibility of sin to which the temptation leads. Laugh sin away and temptation is just an object of humor.

Augustine says that inside each of us is a Serpent, an Eve and an Adam. The Serpent is our sensual needs. Eve is our driving passions. Adam is our rational control. The senses tempt us. Passion moves us to give in. Sin is completed when the reason consents. The results harm other persons, our own integrity and our fulfillment in God.

the desert. He feels the tug of the tempter and stands firm. He doesn't deny temptation. He denies the tempter. He doesn't pretend sin is unreal. He denies the triumph of sin.

Christ, our God, gives us the example of self discipline in the face of temptation and sin. He also offers us the power and grace to undertake our own self discipline. Example and Power to save us. We yearn for nobility of spirit and the exaltation of heroism. Say yes to self discipline. Say no to the tempter. Then say Amen to the gracious Example and Power of the Lord.

Prayer

Father of boundless light, penetrate the darkness of our modern minds which refuse to admit the reality of temptation and sin. Spur us to reject the fashionable taboos and direct us to note the timeless truth about sin and its destructiveness. By the Example and Power of Jesus' resistance to temptation in the desert, move us to the same. Amen.

Twentieth century America, for the majority of its citizens, is an affluent Garden of Eden. Sensuality, passion and a weak reason combine to repeat the Fall of Man story. Left unchecked this will destroy our culture and ruin our lives. America needs the discipline of the desert. Christ shows the way. He leaves the noise of affluence to cope with temptation in the raw. No denial of the reality of sin and temptation here.

God opens himself to the experience of temptation. His vision and determination are cleansed by the fasting and discipline of

Every age has its taboos, those forbidden topics and acts, those unmentionable subjects. The greatest taboo today is the topic of sin. The fruit is not forbidden. To say that it is a sin to eat it is a forbidden statement. This is the denial stage in morality. Destroy the awareness of sin and there is no need to speak of salvation, for there is nothing to be saved from.

Sunday's readings reject the modern taboo and speak forthrightly about temptation, sin and the Fall of Man. The first reading tells of temptation in a Garden of Affluence that leads to sin. The third reading described a temptation in a Desert of Self Discipline that leads to grace. The second reading provides the meaning: Mankind's disobedience in his self indulgent garden is reversed by Christ's obedience in the self emptying desert.

Exult in the Cross

By SISTER CHRISTINE LLOYD

Lord,

I dread Lent.

Your cross wearies me with the weight of my guilt and I do not like standing under its shadow.

I am embarrassed by your agony and the treachery that we human beings can collectively manufacture. I am sick with remembrances of your degradation by enemies and your abandonment by friends. I hate the picture of myself that I see each Lent.

It isn't that I'm not aware of my sinfulness at other times; I am. And I know how deeply it goes and how little power I seem to have to walk lightly, freely. But Lent — especially Holy Week — has a way of removing every escape. I am forced to meet your eyes after denial and to look on you whom we have pierced. I wonder sometimes how I dare believe that you can forgive me.

Lord, it is not easy to be reminded that our jealousy, hatred, frenzy, cowardice can have such brutal

consequences. But your cross says clearly for all time, year after year of Lents, that I can try to murder goodness itself and that I have at times crucified the very likeness of God.

Your cross is too hard a symbol to grasp. Am I missing its point, Lord? Am I missing the Word that your cross can be for me this Lent?

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Friend,

Dare to believe in my forgiveness precisely because of my cross. The Word that you fail to hear in this cross is love. I lived and loved among you and got jostled around often — as you do — by the sinfulness, even the human errors, of others. One person's sin or weakness can cause another's death. It has always been this way.

But why center all your attention on the sin? Sin is nothing new. Look closely at the new revelation: I have been beaten and crucified because of the sinfulness which you abhor but I have never stopped loving. I trusted even to death, when

my whole vision of myself as the anointed could have seemed to have crumbled, but I did trust in that mystery all the while loving even my persecutors. This is what is amazingly new. Your human nature has such grandeur and I have displayed it most regally on the cross — the cross you take credit for having given me.

Exult in this cross, not because it represents your sinfulness, but because by it your sinfulness has been defeated and you now know a truer image of yourself. I am in all ways your brother and you, in my Spirit, are called to trust as I trusted. Believe that even though you too easily sin, you are a part of new life, a new kingdom.

Yes, Lent should show you the cross and should require that you stand under it only because it is there that you will see the limitlessness of love. You are forgiven. My cross tells you so. And the carrying of your cross must proclaim the same message: love defeating hate, love conquering sin.

Sister Christine Lloyd is chairperson of the Theology department at St. Agnes High School.

Do We Need Lent?

By FATHER ALBERT H. CASON

As we find ourselves in another lenten season some of us might be tempted to say, "So what? Lent is old fashioned. It really doesn't mean that much to me anymore."

Do we still need Lent? Do the traditional lenten weeks of prayer, fasting and almsgiving fit our contemporary way of life? Has the Church, because of the many changes and the new freedom, left us too much on our own? Has she left us without guides?

I read somewhere that in those states where winter blizzards are quite common, farmers will tie a rope from the house to the barn. Then, even if the visibility drops to zero during a storm, the farmer can, use the rope as a guide. In these days when new ideas and so many different opinions swirl around us, almost blinding our vision, we too have a guide. Our guide is God Himself who speaks to us through His Church.

In its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican Council II, the authentic voice of Christ in the world today, gives us the purpose of Lent.

We observe Lent because in recalling the mysteries of redemption "The Lord's powers and mercies are made present and the faithful are enabled to lay hold of them and become filled with saving grace."

Yes, Lent does have a place in the life of modern man. Perhaps it is needed even more now than previously. Many of us spend a life time running — running away from God and from ourselves. Lent is a time to stop running. If we take time to turn to God we will be able to see ourselves more clearly. But, in order to do this, we have to figuratively go into the desert, into the wilderness. We must have silence, at least in our soul. We must go off by ourselves to pray, just as Jesus did.

These are noisy times, but we must find time for recollection, time to put ourselves in the presence of God, time to communicate with God in prayer. Lent affords us such an opportunity. Lenten prayer clears our vision, lets us see God more truly, and leads us to share in the glory of Christ's resurrection at Easter.

These days of reform and

change are exciting days. Our religion, and its impact on today's living, makes front page news. The Church that seemed obsolete is proving itself to be eternally youthful. Today the Church is calling upon all of us to be adults, to be more mature in religious practices. Far from being lax and too liberal, the Church is asking each of us for deeper commitment, more earnest dedication. She has freed us from braces, so we will be able to start running with greater strides. A silent time for daily prayer during Lent will enable us to start running with Jesus.

At the Easter Vigil, when we renew our baptismal vows, we will freely renew the Covenant that God has initiated with us. We will do this consciously, deliberately, fully. If we have frequently spoken with God in prayer throughout this lenten season, Easter will be a joyful time. Buried with Christ in the water of baptism, our rising with Him on Easter will be a reality, not just wishful thinking.

Father Albert H. Cason is the regional coordinator for the Tompkins-Tioga Region and is co-pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Owego.

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