

Insights in Liturgy

Lent and the Faithful

By MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

In previous articles we have discussed the meaning of Lent for the catechumens and for the penitents. It remains to ask the question: what is the meaning of Lent for the faithful?

First of all, Lent can become for the faithful a period of quasi-catechumenate. Most of us were baptized as infants and did not have the ex-

perience of a formal catechumenate. Lent can become for us an opportunity to go through something of the experience that belongs to the catechumenate. It can be a retreat for us, in which, through liturgical celebrations, prayer, study and instruction, we can deepen our faith-commitment, as the catechumens did during Lent. If you get beneath the spiritual skin of most Christians, you will find men

and women very much in need of the catechumenal experience. Our catechumenal experience during Lent will lead, as the catechumenate did in the early Church, to Easter. If we live Lent as a kind of retreat, moving us forward on the spiritual journey, the Easter Vigil will be for us a meaningful renewal of our baptismal vows.

Lent not only calls us to a quasi-catechumenal experience, in imitation of the catechumens (and in conjunction with them, if there are catechumens in our parish); it also calls us to imitate the penitents of the early Church. It is a time for reconciliation, a time for breaking down the barriers that separate us from other people and from God. It is a time to overcome the alienations in our lives that bring so much needless frustration and agony of heart. It is a time to express in penitential ways (prayer, fasting and almsgiving are traditional forms of penance) our praise and thanks to God for forgiving our sins and reconciling us to Himself and to others.

Holy Week, during which the reconciliation of the penitents customarily took place, is a most appropriate time for a parish reconciliation service, preparing all the faithful for a joyous participation in the Eucharistic Meal of Holy Thursday, the traditional day of reconciliation in the Church.

Lent can be a meaningful time for all the faithful as they undergo a process similar to a catechumenate, as they experience reconciliation within the Christian community.

Seen in this light, Lent truly leads to a deeper Easter experience, as we continue on the spiritual journey which leads to the final and ultimate Easter when Jesus Christ will reign perfectly over our hearts and the Kingdom of God will have come in all its fullness.

crashing montage switches to daytime. Maytime! Central Park is in blossom. Happy people, on Easter parade, stride confidently along sun-drenched streets. The man, no longer blind, walks now surely, securely — no more groping, no more cane tapping. He looks about, drinks in the light, the sights; smiles, joins the crowds, becomes one with man — no longer alone.


The music too now harmonizes with the joyous mood. Another Ray Repp song is used as background. But this time it is not a series of questions, but an acclamation of faith, set to a heart-a-skipping tune: "Happy is the man who walks in the way of God our Lord and King. Blessed are they who put their trust in Him."

The message of the film is powerful. God's word, His revelation is to man what sight is to a blind man. And God's Holy Spirit is, as the light. As sight restored the blind man to the community of men, so the illumination of God's word by the Holy Spirit builds up the faith and love community that is the Church.

The David story in the first reading is a Cinderella story. The elder brothers are rejected and the younger is crowned king. Grace is like that. God chooses whom He wills, independent of merits and talents. He calls to baptism and the Faith whom He wills.

What response can we make to this graciousness? Eucharist, thanksgiving, to be sure. But light illumines the moral darkness in which unregenerate man, like the Ephesians, walks. In the light life is to be seen in a different light. Genuine perspective is given that allows us to order our lives according to a true scale of values.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 9:1-41. (R1) 1 Sm. 16:1, 6-7. (R2) Eph. 5:8-14.

Last Sunday's theme was water. This Sunday's is light. An ancient name for baptism is "illumination," for in baptism one receives the light of the Holy Spirit.

From the earliest days of the Church, the gospel story of the cure of the blind man was seen as an explicit reference to baptism and its effects. In the early Church, Lent was preparation for those to be baptized on Easter Eve; for us, Lent can be a preparation for the renewal of our baptismal vows on Easter Eve.

There is a dramatic catechetical film on a blind man. It is called "Revelation." The first half of the film presents a blind man. He is tapping with a heavy cane, groping his way through the busy streets around Times Square. It is night! The darkness is almost oppressive. As if in irony, movie marquees flash and flicker; neon signs drool in color "Dancing" or "Brass Rail." The blind man creeps along, tapping his cane.

A Ray Repp song provides background music. The lyrics reveal the yearning, the inner mood of the blind man. "How long, O Lord, must we keep waiting, keep on this way, hoping for something we don't understand, looking for answers? Open our mind and truth will find us. Shed light on your people." As the blind man moves along — alone, all, all alone in the crowded streets — the lyrics suggest this awful effect of blindness. "We walk in darkness, alone! Bring us close to each other's side, then answers might be known."

In the middle of the film, the face of Christ on the Turin Shroud is shown and the gospel story of the cure of blind Bartimeus is narrated. What was once done is shown as done to this blind man in Times Square. He recovers his sight through Christ!

As he does, the film in a

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