

THOUGHTS FOR LENT

The Changing Face of Lent

By FATHER
CONRAD SUNDHOLM,
Vice-President of the
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The sight of the old pull down movie screen on the wall of St. Bridget's in East Bloomfield, and the sound of Father George Doud's invitation to come see the pictures are a part of the story recalled by the Ghost of Lenten Past. As a child I always wondered what tales were told on that sanctuary screen during the Sunday nights of Lent. I'll never know; it was an adults only presentation.

I guess I never really became a part of Lent until fourth grade at St. Andrew's when I bought my first missal, Father Stedman's black covered with purple

print. Lenten missal. That was maturity!

Sister Rosemary insisted that every good Catholic fifth grader should have a written list of his or her spiritual exercises for Lent. I proudly and carefully prepared my spiritual isometrics. I felt so very Catholic being able to give up Mound Bars, Fifth Avenues, and Hershey kisses. I was especially willing to bypass Saturday shows at the long gone Dixie Theatre, since Mother only allowed me to go about twice a year. My Lenten program was not a "heavy"; but somehow I felt a little closer to the Lord by Easter Sunday. I knew I just had to be a little bit worthier to carry my Cala Lily in the Holy Thursday procession.



FR. SUNDHOLM
If I had any doubts about my virtues Msgr. Eckl always assured us of how

good we were and how pleased we made the suffering Christ. Do you know something? I believed him!

The Ghost of Lenten Present won't speak to me of holy movies on the walls of St. Salome's. We shall be listening to a scripture course on St. Paul's Epistles. Sister Rosemary won't be around to collect my self denial list of missing candy bars and Saturday matinee movies. Father Stedman's missal has long since disappeared, yet the Ghost of Lenten Present must still be able to speak of ways to make me feel better about my Lord and myself. Somehow I've just got to be some way better by the time the Easter Lilies arrive.

Jesus often stepped aside for reflective prayer to look at His Father, Himself, and His loved ones. He never attended a management seminar on prioritizing or goal setting; yet He knew goals and priorities were an integral part of His plan for life. My guess is that your Lenten methodology is not as important as your Lenten goal. There are many ways to prioritize and reach goals. Our Lenten practices have been drastically altered over the past two decades. This fact neither says Lenten are better or worse than in an earlier year. My own goal hasn't

changed. I no longer write my list for Sister Rosemary of await my Cala Lily and good word from Msgr. Eckl; but still I want to feel like and be a better person by Easter morn

Well what am I going to do to replace Sister Rosemary's list? Somehow like the Lord Himself I must step aside for reflective prayer, that I too can prioritize the parts of my life. I must be reassured of how important God is to me and I to Him. I must feel good about myself and my friendship with Jesus.

I must deny myself a few things. Some no's must be said to my desires and directions. I must be able to experience, as Jesus did, that only God and my shared existence with Him are essential. Today I already have everything that is really necessary to be happy. It is crucial to know that all the people and things in my life are there not because I need them; but because God gives them as loving gifts. Finding times and places to say no to one's self, reflecting on the experience of self denial, and the acceptance of pain lead me to see the priority that God intends for my life. I become a more loving person because I see people not as means to achieve my happiness. I love them so

that I can share a God given happiness I already hold within me. I reach out to them with new openness to love. In my own realization of confidence and security I grow as a "giver" with a God given assurance that I don't have to be a "taker".

Seeing the priorities and goals of my life in the light of faith makes all things new. Fear vanishes in the light of self-confidence. The thrill of reaching out to give replaces the worry over what I think I need. Any burden of depression is lifted by the joy of living in Christ. I don't need to be a faker. I have the courage to allow the real me to show through because I sense my own goodness. Good Fridays are never as bad as they seem for Easter Sundays always follow. I become an Easter person.

The Ghost of Lenten Future will know whether I've moved little or not at all. In the trek from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday I shall realize that Jesus cares for me now. To experience the love of Jesus for me reveals a goodness that already is in me. By the time I kneel in St. Salome's to enjoy the celebration of Easter and the fragrance of its lilies I shall be a better person just for having shared Jesus' vision of who I am. I am an Easter person.

Cure of the Blind

By FATHER
ALFRED MCBRIDE

Physical blindness often serves as an image of mental stubbornness and spiritual sin. One feels compassion for the truly blind. It is frustrating to empathize with closed minds and hearts. Executives face this when they vainly try to change company policy. Church reformers deal with it in trying to implement Vatican II. Blindness in religion causes prophets to be stoned and angels to weep.

The story of the Cure of the Man Born Blind illustrates the perennial problem of the tension between simple faith and the perils of religious learning. It would be wrong to draw the conclusion that simple faith is better than religious learning. Aquinas was just as much of a saint as the unlearned Cure of Ars. Both the uneducated as well as the learned can have closed minds and sinful hearts. The story here is not opposing ignorance and learning so much as an education that causes arrogant prejudice against the unschooled. This is a peril that afflicts both secular as well as religious educators.

Jesus cures a well known blind beggar. When asked about it, the beggar declares that Jesus did it and he must be a prophet. The religious intellectuals were put off on two accounts. The existence of a miracle. The capacity of a nobody to identify a real prophet. They see themselves as protectors of formal religion. They reserve for themselves the right to prophesy and anoint the one they think is heir to the mantle of biblical prophets. They feel, after all, that their long years of study have made them professionally competent to recognize God's work in the world. They can hardly believe such insight has come from a man who never read a book.

They do not intimidate the blind man. Unimpressed, he tells them their studies have closed their minds.



They are looking right at a miracle and can't see it. They have seen and heard Jesus and cannot perceive his prophetic quality. All their years of combing the scriptures, analyzing words and talking about laws have not given them insight. They, who should be the light, are blind guides. His forthright simplicity drives them into a rage. "You were born in utter sin. And would you teach us?" So they excommunicated him.

The beggar shakes the dust from his feet and goes outside to feast his eyes on the world he never saw before. The first person he meets is Jesus. Christ asks him to believe and trust in him as the hope of the world and the source of love. And the man who could pass no theology exams kneels and says simply, "I believe."

This story is meant to praise simple faith, whether it be found among the ignorant or the learned, whether in the hovels of the poor or the lecture halls of a university, whether on the streets of Calcutta or the lawns of Oxford. The learned must die to any arrogance induced by their studies. The unschooled must die to any hardness of heart induced by their unfortunate condition. A person can be closed by the pomposity of education or by the despair induced

through poverty. There is a vicious circle for the rich as well as the poor. Both need the openness that leads to the light of faith. Both require the death to self that is a precondition to personal Easter.

Historians say that today's story was a popular feature of Baptismal ceremonies in the early Church. The physical illumination of the man was paralleled by his spiritual enlightening. May he pray for our faith this day to give us the light to see as he did.

Charismatic Mass Set

Ithaca — The monthly Charismatic Mass, sponsored by prayer groups in the Southern Tier, will be held at Cornell University on Friday, March 3.

Father Thomas Schmidt, CSSR, of Notre Dame Retreat House and head of the diocesan liaison committee for the Charismatic Renewal, will be the principal celebrant. Father James Connolly, SJ, of Cornell, will preach the homily.

The services begin at 7:30 p.m. in Anabel Taylor Hall Auditorium. Information is available by calling (607) 256-4228.

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