

Lent... A Season of Hope

Insights in Liturgy

Lent: The Covenant Renewal

This Ash Wednesday, we hear in the Church (and, let us hope, in our conscience) God calling us: "Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 95: 7,8).

God summons us to go into the desert with Jesus for forty days, to affirm and renew our covenant with Him. Whether we advert to it or not, we are God's covenanted people, christened and sealed, an elect community like a city on a mountain for all to see.

Like the Hebrews of the old Covenant, we harden our hearts, close our eyes and ears to Him. We do not keep faith with our covenant promises. So our lunar calendar brings us once more to the Lenten season when God invites us out into the desert as He did Israel of old through the prophet Hosea:

"I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart. She shall respond there as in the days of her youth, when she came up from the land of Egypt.

"On that day, says the Lord, she shall call Me 'My

husband'. I will espouse you to Me forever; I will espouse you in right and justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord" (2:16,18,21,22).

Devout Christians will accept these Lenten days as a season in the desert. They will come to feel once more the allurements of God. Being not only in the world, but too much of the world, so many of God's people become stolid, calloused. Like ancient Israel, they are like some tired, embittered wife, who has forgotten how love once was. Dirtied and numbed by life, they cannot feel as they once did. So God calls them into the desert silence and abstinence of Lent, to hear the language of His

espousals once again, to become enveloped with His intimacy, to recover the frank response of the former time. They will renew their nuptial covenant. They will say their vow once more, as wife to husband: "I will be yours." And they will hear Him say, as husband to wife: "I will be yours."

What does this mean, this covenant relationship with God, deep down in the heart of the matter?

For all too many of us, the God we think of is not the same God he shows Himself to be in the Bible. We make of Him a kind of abstraction, a philosophic conclusion, a theological construct, a catechism definition. Even with the revelation of His Trinity of Persons, we do not touch Him as really personal.

This was very much the way it was with the great French thinker Pascal, until one night he was favored with a burning vision, of which he wrote this passionate memorial: "Fire: the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, the God of Jacob, not the God of

philosophers and scholars. Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy."

The God who so enraptured the young servant was the biblical God, who brought the patriarchs into covenant with Himself, who make their descendants His chosen people, wresting them out of Egyptian slavery, and bringing them through the Sinai desert into a "land of milk and honey."

It is the God who enters into our history and reveals His loving kindness, most especially and definitively in His beloved Son. Jesus is the Lord of the new and everlasting Covenant. Through Him the Father becomes our partner, shares our burdens, invites our correspondence with His will, entices us back from our infidelities. Jesus is the mediator through whom we become, by rebirth in Baptism, God's sons and daughters, the family and community of the New Covenant, a kingly, priestly and holy people.

We of the Church are not an ethical club, a coterie of transcendental meditation. We are the

Body of Christ, indwelt by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, corresponding with our covenant Spouse in a communion of love and fidelity.

Yet we know we are a sinful people, a Church always in need of purification. All too easily we become like the wife mentioned above. We become insensitive to our first love. We do not feel the earlier fervor. And so the Spouse invites us to enter the desert of Lent that we may "hear the language of our espousals once again and feel the envelopment of His intimacy," through prayer and watching, through self-surrender in fasting and generous outlays of time and resources for the deprived and underprivileged.

This is the call of Lent — to covenant renewal, to the rejuvenation of our spousal love for the God who embraces us, dearer than any husband his wife, in that "new and everlasting covenant" to which He is ever faithful, even though we so often become strangers and aliens to it.

At Our Lady of Victory

Mass Seen Chief Lenten Discipline

Parishioners at Our Lady of Victory Church in downtown Rochester were asked recently, after the daily 12:10 p.m. Mass, what they planned to do for Lent this year. The following are some of the replies.

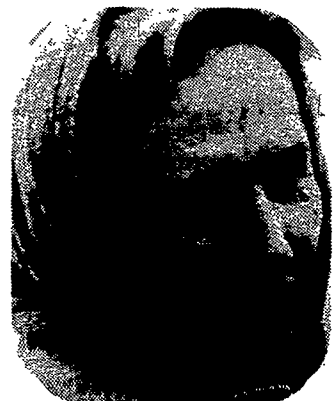
Mary Stanley said that she planned to say the Stations of the Cross and attend Mass every day. Esther Lombardo hopes to be able to receive Communion at Mass each day and also say the Stations.

John Morrell stated that he will try to get to Mass more often during the week and say the stations. Isabell McCarthy said that she will say a daily rosary and attend Mass. Peggy Manning wants to go to Mass every Monday when she is downtown.

Josephine Modzel will attend Mass daily and listen to the Rosary broadcast on the radio.

Sister Joseph Mary Zimmer, SSND, who is now on leave from her duties at Bishop Kearney High School to care for her parents, said that she hopes to take the Eucharist to her mother and father several times a week and say the Stations of the Cross with them at home because they can't get out much these days. Personally she hopes to "read and reflect for fifteen minutes daily on the Scriptures, particularly those relating to the Lenten liturgy," and to "offer my services to the Literacy Volunteers of Rochester, Inc."

Delilah Logue plans to avoid eating between meals and to attend Mass more during the week.



MARY STANLEY



ESTHER LOMBARDO



JOHN MORRELL



ISABELL MCCARTHY



PEGGY MANNING



JOSEPHINE MODZEL



SR. JOSEPH MARY



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