

Lent a time for service, reflection

Last weekend I went to Windsor, Ontario, to give one talk in a series of talks being presented as part of Assumption University's Christian Culture Series. I was invited to come to Windsor by a good friend of many in this area, Father Ulysse "Bud" Pare, CSB. Bud is a former superior general of the Basilian Fathers and is currently president of Assumption University.

By a second invitation, Father Dennis Noelke, CSB, afforded me the privilege of presiding and preaching at Catholic Campus Community's Sunday morning Eucharistic Liturgy. I was happy to accept that invitation for many reasons, among them Dennis' generous service to our young people during his many years at Aquinas Institute in Rochester.

Both the liturgy at 11:30 and the talk at 3 p.m. were most enjoyable experiences for me. The folks at both gatherings were warm and hospitable. Those qualities in them were great gifts to me, as I am sure they are to all of us. Such gifts generally give us confidence, help us to relax and tend to draw out the best that is in us.

My theme was Life and Spirituality. The understanding was that I would comment on ways in which we can live lives of prayer, aware of God's presence, even in our culture, which can be so complex, fast-moving and distracting.

I enjoyed thinking about the theme in the weeks preceding the talk. The effort evoked memories of many people who, over the years, have entrusted to me the

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

stories of their journeys of faith and their desires to develop a lively awareness of God's loving presence in their lives.

The task also brought me back to many of the high and low points of my own history. I am grateful for both streams of memory because each in its own way allowed me a fresh perspective on life. Each heightened my awareness that God is always lovingly present to us even when we forget who we are and lose our way.

It was coincidence, I believe, that my talk was scheduled shortly before the beginning of Lent. If so, it was a happy coincidence. I say that because, with hindsight, I appreciate both the time of preparation and the time I spent with the people on Sunday afternoon as God's kind way of drawing me into the spirit of Lent.

The event reminded me that God is never done with us — that God never ceases offering us the invitation or the help to grow more and more in freedom and maturity, wisdom and grace. Lent is a special time because it calls us to turn our hearts back

to a fuller awareness of that call and away from dispositions and activities that do not serve life.

If you have been looking for a way to approach the holy season or if you, like me, appreciate suggestions that prime the pump, let me suggest briefly three themes you might think about. I mention them because I believe they are among qualities or realities that contribute to the kind of inner strength for which we all yearn:

1. A reverent care for my own well-being. Lent is a favorable time to remember the precious gift of life which is ours and the responsibility we have to ourselves and others to treat ourselves with respect. The fasting to which we are called in Lent draws us to think about and care for such things.

2. Desire for a lively sense of God's presence in our lives. Lent calls us gently but strongly to look through, beneath and beyond the confusion of our days, that we might find the God who is there in it all, calling us to deeper life. Lent's call to prayer offers us a way to deeper clarity, rewarding direction.

3. A sense of service that takes us beyond ourselves so we can find ourselves. There is fresh life and new discovery available in service to others offered in the name of Christ. When the church asks us to give alms during Lent, it opens the door to such life, to such discoveries.

I wish for you and for all those you love many blessings for the Lenten Season.
Peace to all.

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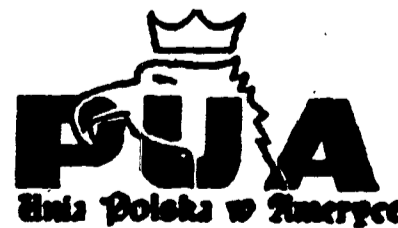
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