

In preparation for the Lenten season

Are you ready for this Lenten season and its invitation to join our catechumens and candidates in preparation for the Easter feast? Those dear sisters and brothers are now very close to baptism and reception into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, respectively, at the Easter vigil. During these weeks of Lent they will experience a special time of prayer in preparation for this sacred event in their lives. And we will intensify our prayers offered for them throughout the year during the weeks ahead.

We pray also for one another, already baptized, so that we too might open our hearts to God's call to ongoing, deepening conversion in our lives. As I invite you to pray that we will all be faithful to that call, I promise my daily prayer for that intention. And I ask your prayers for my own growth in the Lord.

We all are called to that kind of conversion. But how such an invitation comes to us — what it might ask of us, where it might lead us — will differ from person to person. Sometimes I am quite sure what God asks of me and have a good sense of how to get there. When that is the case, I pray for the grace to respond generously.

There are other times, however, when I know the need to change but lack clarity about what the Lord asks of me. Then I pray for patience and the gift of deeper insight into myself. I also find it very helpful to ask friends who know me to help me in that search. That is rarely easy but always

along the way

By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



helpful, so I try not to let pride stand in the way of asking for such understanding and assistance. The hardest part is asking. Once I get past that obstacle, I find that friends always come through. They may not know the answer, but they support the search with prayer and good counsel, and that means the world to me.

I won't bore you with the details about what I think are my needs for ongoing conversion and a change of heart in preparation for Easter. But I would like to offer for your consideration some questions I find helpful to review in preparation for the Lenten season:

1. What do I identify in this stage of my life as the greatest sources of growth, confidence and renewed hope? Do I appreciate the power and purpose of such gifts? Have I expressed my gratitude for them in appropriate ways? If I have not, what holds me back?

2. What do I name as the most important relationships in my life? As I review them peacefully and confidently, do I know the

need to strengthen, adjust or heal any of them? How might I go about that?

3. Am I making an honest effort to sort out life's complexities so that I do my best to use my time, treasure and talent to express my deepest values and honor my greatest loves?

4. Do I exercise a reasonable stewardship over my body? Do I get an amount of sleep sufficient for my needs? Do I engage in physical exercise appropriate to my age and health? Do I strive for good nutrition? Do I respect my body by enjoying good things in moderation and by avoiding those that cause me harm?

5. Does my lifestyle reflect our Christian belief that all God-given gifts are for the common good and not just for those who receive them? If not, how might I begin to change that?

6. As best I know myself at this stage of my life, what would I name as the next realistic, life giving, generous step I might take to express and to grow in my genuine love for God and neighbor? Can I do this on my own or should I ask for help? If I need help, of whom shall I ask it?

I hope you do not find such questions burdensome. They are not meant to be so. Rather, my hope is that they will lead you to be in touch with your own experiences and give birth to questions far superior to my own because they are yours and because they express your desire to come to the fullness to which God calls every one of us.

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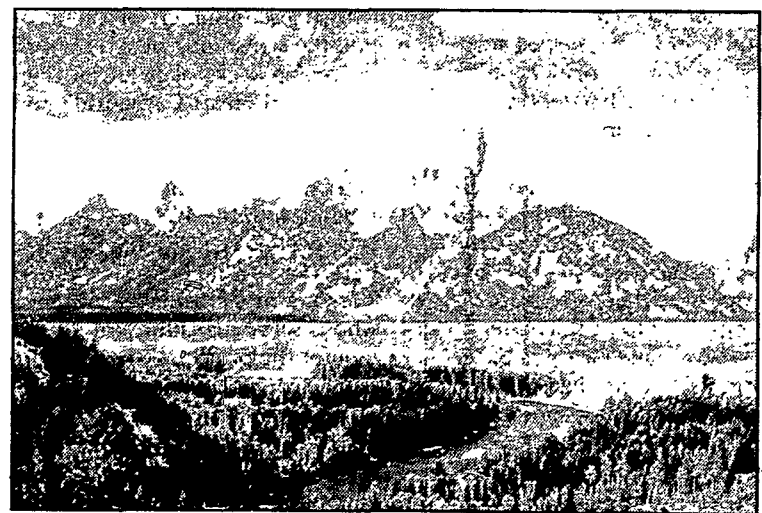
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