

March 1, 2020  
A note from Father Phil

A lot of Lenten spirituality these days' centers around positive acts: Doing charitable works, attending a weekday Mass or Stations of the Cross, contributing to the Rice Bowl, or being kind to someone whom you would just as soon smack. These acts are good. They break down one's reluctance to accept God's kindnesses and forgiveness. They are faithful to the teachings of Jesus and honor his life.

One Lent I decided to do something positive: I tried to eat eggs. For as long as I can remember I have hated them. It's a texture thing. I thought getting over this lifelong aversion would help me get over more significant walls. After three days, three eggs, and about three loaves of bread to get the snotty things down, I had to give it up. I couldn't imagine God being pleased with my distorted facial expressions and horrible gagging noises that followed the half-hearted grace before the meal. Neither were my seminary classmates amused.

Along with positive acts there is something to be said for self-denial during this holy season. Lent puts a template on our lives, a fence around our excesses, and presents an opportunity to imitate some of the great saints that we have heard about.

Yet, the season is not asking for a lifetime commitment to greatness. Just a little over forty days. And giving up just one thing. Yet, this good old-fashioned self-denial can still surprise. One Lent I was a salt celibate. And on Easter Sunday an amazing thing happened. I found that I didn't crave salt or need it as much as I thought I did. In fact, I thought that the Easter ham and kielbasa tasted way too salty. Since then I taste my food before I season it. Lent changed an unhealthy habit.

I suspect others have had similar experiences with candy, caffeine, cigarettes or other objects of self-denial. If so, these people have been released from bondage. Resurrected because they took the first step to walk away from the tyranny of a bad habit.

Although Ash Wednesday has come and gone, it is not too late to begin a Lenten practice. Without Lent, one might never take the opportunity to see the person that he or she is, let alone the person that he or she could be. Lent is a wonderful gift and opportunity to learn something new about ourselves. And about God.

And speaking of wonderful gifts and opportunities: What an honor it was to participate in the Confirmation ceremony of our young people at the Cathedral last Sunday. Congratulations to the those confirmed, their parents, sponsors and teachers.