

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Ash Wednesday – February 22, 2023

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

-Matthew 6:1-

The season of Lent is a time of spiritual *growth*. And to promote this growth, some engage in Lenten disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, fasting, giving alms, and so forth. Behind all such disciplines, however, is the idea that we are not what we should be. We fall short of the glory of God both in the bad things that we do and in the good things that we fail to do. And so, basic to all our Lenten disciplines is the root discipline of penitence (feeling sorry for having done wrong). Lent is a time to confront our sin and repent of it so that we might grow in our love of God and neighbor.

In this regard, St. Matthew reminds us that our sin does not merely concern our sinful actions. It also concerns the sinful motives behind our actions. Even our good actions become sinful when they are driven by base motives. And these base motives, in turn, show us both the nature and the root of our sin. As to its nature, sin is being curved-in on ourselves, locked up within ourselves, and bound by our self-centeredness. As to its root, sinful actions spring from our sinful, self-centered hearts. We are not primarily sinners because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners. Our sin springs from deep within us because we are self-centered sinners from the inside out.

And so, our good works are like cutting off dandelions. They make us look good on the surface, but our sinful root remains intact. For us to be the people that God wants us to be, we need more than moral reform. Our sin must be completely wiped out. And since this is beyond our power, we are driven to our knees to cry out for God’s justifying and sanctifying grace.

It is in this way that we *grow* spiritually during the season of Lent. Through the root discipline of penitence, we confront both the root and the nature of our sin. As a result, we long for God’s ultimate deliverance and *grow* in our daily dependence upon Him. Through word and sacrament, we receive God’s grace. And in this way, God frees us from ourselves that we might *grow* in our love for Him and in our loving service to our neighbor.

Lent is a time of spiritual *growth*, precisely because it calls us back to the basics of our faith.