

From the Bishop

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love ... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Psalm 51:1, 10*

By the time you read these words the season of Lent and our 40-day journey to the paschal mystery will have begun. I think of Lent as a time when we are called to be honest about ourselves before God. “Remember, you are dust and to dust you shall return.” It calls for a transparency in life. We no longer hide from the truth. We are mortal and sinful creatures. But this honesty and transparency is made possible because of God whose mercy and love is steadfast.

Lent reminds us we are finite beings. We remember that sometimes we feel close to God, on top of the world, and certain about so many things. Life is good. But we remember also those times when our lives are all messed up, God seems distant or even non-existent, and we just can’t make sense of who we are or where the world is headed.

We are very good at making room in our lives for those rosy times, when we seem to have things together and God seems to be sending one blessing after another. We are not so good at creating space for people to express those feelings of disillusionment, the questions of why God seems absent, or why one’s soul is empty or forlorn.

At one of our recent gatherings of the Re-Imagining Church Cluster, a lay leader commented on church life today. She said something like this, “I know that Church is more than just putting people in the pew, more than a building or a budget, but who are we to be today, in today’s world? So much has changed.” Here was a person who loves the Church but is finding it hard to make sense of where life is headed today.

In a sense, she was grieving a time that has passed and will not return. Her comment also made me think about how disoriented a person feels upon the news of the sudden death of a loved one. Life has changed so dramatically, upending routines and rhythms, changing one’s outlook and hopes and dreams. Only through deep grief does a person move to a new life.

Over the years I have found the insights of Walter Brueggemann very helpful. He says in **The Psalms and the Life of Faith**, “[the psalms] present human persons in situations of regression: when they are most vulnerable in hurt, most ecstatic in naïve joy, most sensitized to life, driven to the extremities of life and faith.” He proceeds to identify three types of psalms: psalms of orientation (things are going well), psalms of disorientation (life is the pits) and psalms of reorientation (God takes us to a new place). Brueggemann says people have “...(a) deep reluctance to let loose of a world that has passed away, and (b) capacity to embrace a new world being given.”

Lent is a time to admit that we may feel disoriented in the midst of so much change and tumult. That change may be in the culture around us, the global community, politics or in our local church life. The change may be within our own web of family and friends.

Lent reminds us there is One who has gone before us and was tested in the wilderness as his own journey began. I imagine Jesus Christ went through his own time of feeling totally disoriented. Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that though Jesus was the Son of God, he emptied himself and became a slave and went to his death on the cross. All this was before he was highly exalted and given the name above every other name.

May your Lenten journey – with all those feelings of dislocation and disorientation – lead to a new and right spirit.