

Homily for 12:05 Liturgy; Ash Wednesday 2019 (Short Form)  
Church of the Ascension, Chicago, IL  
Rev. Dr. Robert Petite, Assisting Priest

Desire and its ordering and fulfillment is at the very heart of the Season of Lent.

Ash Wednesday begins with the call to fast from transitory desires. We are invited through fasting and abstinence, to order our desires. There is a restlessness in all of us, a restlessness that remains until we find our rest in God. That restlessness is manifested through our experience of desire.

Lent invites us for a time to order that desire by symbolically giving up transitory things, the things that rust and time corrupt. The way the Church does this is to invite us to give up some symbolic thing for Lent, usually a particular food or practice, to remind us of the need to finally give up all things, to acknowledge that we, like them, are dust, but for the divine image within us, and the restoration of that image through Christ's victory on the Cross and his resurrection.

We refrain from eating, much like we would have liked Adam in the Book of Genesis to refrain from eating the apple and instead rest in his dependence and relationship with God.

In the practice of self-denial, we are actually meant to let our hunger to just happen, to actually activate our desire. We are invited to experience the desire for the thing we have given up even more. But in the process of fasting, of resisting, to learn that the thing we have come to desire will not satisfy; and are invited instead to turn to the food that will.

We turn to the Eucharist, to the scriptures, to holy reading, reconciliation, contemplation and meditation, to all manner of spiritual practices that will place us in relationship with God, to all of the many ways we can nurture and stir and support the divine within us. We turn to those things that will deepen our relationship with Christ, a relationship that can satisfy the ultimate desire that is so much a part of who we really are.

And we turn as well, though what traditionally has been called alms giving, to the spiritual practice of loving our neighbor.

So we desire, we become hungry for all the things the world has to offer as ends in themselves, and in the midst of that hunger and desire, we turn instead to all the spiritual practices that will deepen our relationship to the one who ultimately will cure our restlessness, who will pour his love into our hearts. Who will ultimately fulfill our desires and welcome us home where true joys are to be found.

Increasing and learning more about who we truly are is one of the aims of keeping a holy Lent. We are made in God's image and likeness, we are restless with a desire for ultimate fulfillment in that image. Indeed that Image is constantly calling us through our desires, like a magnet to iron, into a deeper and more fulfilling relationship with the source of our being. Lent simply deepens and enhances that opportunity.