Lent quote by Joan Chittister (March 3, 2012)



Lent is not a ritual.
It is time given to think seriously about who Jesus is for us, to renew our faith from the inside out.
It is the moment when, as the baptismal waters flow on every Easter Vigil altar, we return to the baptismal font of the heart to say yes once more to the call of Jesus to the disciples, "Come and see" (John 1:39).
It is the act of beginning our spiritual life all over again refreshed and reoriented.

WHY GIVE UP STUFF FOR LENT

from *The Liturgical Year* by Joan Chittister

Life, we come to understand, is not only about joy. It is about the power to endure what is not joyful as well.

I remember quite clearly the day in grade school when my teacher put a large box on the corner of her desk and posters of starving children around the room. Lent was coming, she explained to us. We should give up candy and put the candy money we saved in the box for the missions. These were the poster children we should be sacrificing to save.

It was a child's catechetical exercise, yes, but it carried with it spiritual messages enough to last for a lifetime. Clearly, we were being put on notice. There were things in life, other people in life, for which each of us was responsible, however young we were and whether we had any association with them or not. There were things in life so important, it seemed, that we would need to give up some things for ourselves in order to take care of the needs of others. And it all had something to do with God.

When you're young, the act of giving something up for Lent is an epochal moment. It involves a complete revaluation of what it means to be human. If life is not about permanent and continual self-satisfaction, what is it about? And why? How is it that the notion of bridling the self can be as important as satisfying the self?

Over the centuries, thanks to a better appreciation of both the body and the material world, religious figures have been careful to curb the excesses of asceticism. The starving, wild-eyed holy man is a figure of the past now. But the notion that self-control is an essential part of the spiritual life is a basic one. What's more, it is also a psychologically healthy one as well.

Athletes practice asceticism to achieve physical development and somatic control. They give up food and time and physical comfort to conquer mountains and swim channels and win athletic competitions. Spiritual seekers do the same things, but they do them for a different reason. Their goal is to conquer themselves and develop their souls.

There is nothing passive about asceticism. It is the active giving of the self—physical and spiritual—in order to concentrate the soul, viselike, on the center of life rather than on its peripherals. The ascetic knows that to become what we can become spiritually, some things—even good things, perhaps—must be forgone. It is not that good things must be forsaken; it is that they must be indulged in with balance. The Talmud says that "If a person has the opportunity to taste a new fruit and refuses to do so, he will have to account for that in the next world." The ascetic lives with the spiritual awareness that choosing between the good and the better is the discipline that makes us the best of what we set out to be. Asceticism is not about giving things up for their own sake. It is as much about achieving more life—another kind of life—as it is about giving it up.

3 THINGS THAT MAKE LENT REAL

Sister Joan Chittister, 2016

"And what does God require of you?" Scripture asks. The answer is a stark one: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." What?!

The answer confuses us. It takes our puny little religious concepts, the ones we attribute to God in order to make ourselves feel good and turns them upside down. A people given to religious bartering—so many turtle doves, so many bullocks, so much Lenten fasting done to keep God happy with us—is told that sacrifice is not the answer. Only conversion of life really counts where the God of gods is concerned. In fact, it is the ultimate sacrifice asked for here, this putting down of the greed we call "progress" and the vindictiveness we call "justice" and the pride we call "success."

But that’s where Lent gets real.

It is the justice of the Jesus who cured Romans as well as Jews that we are expected to practice in a world full of refugees and political enemies and children without health insurance. It is the mercy of the Jesus, who lifted up the woman taken in adultery and befriended the tax collector in the tree that we are expected to bring to the world around us.

It is simplicity of the Jesus, who “became just like us” and did not consider “being equal to God a thing to be clung to” that we are to show to those on the social ladder beneath us—that is the real Lenten fasting God desires of us. Lent leads us to ask ourselves how much of any of this kind of sacrifice we are really doing. Justice, mercy, and simplicity of life are the only things that make for a genuine Lent.

Lent can also be about joy

Cynthia Taylor



You may have seen people walking around recently with a dark, cross-shaped smudge on their forehead. You can be forgiven for thinking they either didn't look in the mirror before leaving the house or they were early for Halloween. What you were seeing were the marks of Ash Wednesday, which begins the 40 days of Lent in many Christian traditions. As people are being marked with this ashen cross, they hear the words, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."

To those outside the church this will seem morbid - to have death rubbed in your face and to be reminded of your own mortality. But this is a reminder that God created us out of the dust of the ground and that one day we will return to the ground. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. This may sound incredibly depressing (and who wants to be depressed?) but for me this is a message of hope and renewal. Sister Joan Chittister puts it this way, "Lent is the opportunity

to change what we ought to change, but have not ... Lent is about becoming, doing and changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us right now ... Lent is a summons to live anew."

For many, Lent is a time to give up something like candy or TV, or even (gasp) social media, if you can imagine that. For others, it is a time to take on something - to take the time to be in prayer or to be of extra help to those in need.

For me, this Lent is going to be a bit different; I'm going to take on joy. I've had too many seasons lately of darkness, loss, and grief. And I'm all too aware of the many, many times that I've squandered the inheritance of joy and life that are ours. I'm the one who has been rubbing my face in the ash for days on end, forgetting the joy of life and love which are God's gift to us NOW.

I have a tangible reminder of that squandered inheritance in a well-loved tennis ball. It belonged to my dog, Jack, who died very unexpectedly just three weeks ago. Jack was a Corgi, but he must have had some Labrador Retriever in him because he loved chasing this ball more than anything else. He was not unlike a print (by Dug Nap) which hangs in my study; it shows a black Lab lying on his stomach cradling a ball. The dog positively coos, "Oh my beloved ball. How I do cherish thee. You are my sun, my moon. You are my … my ALL."

Anytime Jack went outside he would immediately begin searching for his ball and then bring it to me to throw. To see Jack and his ball was to see joy in action. Sometimes I would stop what I was doing to toss the ball to him, but, more often than not, I was busy with things that needed to get done - dinner to fix, bills to pay, a movie that absolutely needed to be watched. I knew there would come a time when I would miss Jack's interruptions; I just didn't know it would come so soon.

So, this little ball reminds me of all the ways I've squandered my inheritance to live fully as a child of God and claim the joy that is mine, rather than all the work that is mine. Joy, now and eternal joy to come, is our birthright as God's beloved children. In whatever way you choose to observe Lent, please keep in mind that Jesus did not go to Jerusalem, die on the Cross and rise from the dead only for us to feel rotten about ourselves for the rest of our lives.

This is the season we acknowledge when we didn't keep our eye on the ball, when we dropped the ball, and there is grief in that - but it's just a season. Keep your eyes peeled for grace and listen for those holy words "Play Ball" and play. Play.

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LENT 2022: MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER, POPE FRANCIS

The Catholic Telegraph / *March 3, 2022*

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Lent is a favorable time for personal and community renewal, as it leads us to the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For our Lenten journey in 2022, we will do well to reflect on Saint Paul's exhortation to the Galatians: "Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity (kairós), let us do good to all" (Gal. 6:9-10).

1. SOWING AND REAPING

In these words, the Apostle evokes the image of sowing and reaping, so dear to Jesus (Mt. 13). St. Paul speaks to us of a kairós: an opportune time for sowing goodness in view of a future harvest. What is this "opportune time" for us? Lent is certainly such an opportune time, but so is our entire existence, of which Lent is in some way an image. All too often in our lives, greed, pride, and the desire to possess, accumulate and consume have the upper hand, as we see from the story of the foolish man in the Gospel parable, who thought his life was safe and secure because of the abundant grain and goods he had stored in his barns (Lk. 12:16-21). Lent invites us to conversion, to a change in mindset, so that life's truth and beauty may be found not so much in possessing as in giving, not so much in accumulating as in sowing and sharing goodness.

The first to sow is God himself, who with great generosity "continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness in our human family". During Lent we are called to respond to God's gift by accepting His word, which is "living and active" (Heb. 4:12). Regular listening to the word of God makes us open and docile to his

working (Jas. 1:21) and bears fruit in our lives. This brings us great joy, yet even more, it summons us to become God's co-workers (1 Cor 3:9). By making good use of the present time (Eph. 5:16), we too can sow seeds of goodness. This call to sow goodness should not be seen as a burden but a grace, whereby the Creator wishes us to be actively united with his own bountiful goodness.

What about the harvest? Do we not sow seeds in order to reap a harvest? Of course! Saint Paul points to the close relationship between sowing and reaping when he says: "Anyone who sows sparsely will reap sparsely as well, and anyone who sows generously will reap generously as well" (2 Cor. 9:6). But what kind of harvest are we talking about? A first fruit of the goodness we sow appears in ourselves and our daily lives, even in our little acts of kindness. In God, no act of love, no matter how small, and no "generous effort" will ever be lost (Evangelii Gaudium, 279). Just as we recognize a tree by its fruits (Mt. 7:16, 20), so a life full of good deeds radiates light (Mt. 5:14-16) and carries the fragrance of Christ to the world (2 Cor. 2:15). Serving God in freedom from sin brings forth fruits of sanctification for the salvation of all (Rom. 6:22).

In truth, we see only a small portion of the fruits of what we sow, since, according to the Gospel proverb, "one sows, while another reaps" (Jn. 4:37). When we sow for the benefit of others, we share in God's own benevolent love: "it is truly noble to place our hope in the hidden power of the seeds of goodness we sow, and thus to initiate processes whose fruits will be reaped by others" (FT, 196). Sowing goodness for the benefit of others frees us from narrow self-interest, infuses our actions with gratuitousness, and makes us part of the magnificent horizon of God's benevolent plan.

The word of God broadens and elevates our vision: it tells us that the real harvest is eschatological, the harvest of the last, undying day. The mature fruit of our lives and actions is "fruit for eternal life" (Jn. 4:36), our "treasure in heaven" (Lk. 12:33; 18:22). Jesus himself uses the image of the seed that dies in the ground in order to bear fruit as a symbol of the mystery of his death and resurrection (Jn. 12:24); while Saint Paul uses the same image to speak of the resurrection of our bodies: "What is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable; what is sown is contemptible but what is raised is glorious; what is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful; what is sown is a natural body, and what is raised is a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:42-44). The hope of resurrection is the great light that the risen Christ brings to the world, for "if our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we

are of all people the most pitiable. In fact, however, Christ has been raised from the dead, as the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:19-20). Those who are intimately united to him in love "by dying a death like his" (Rom. 6:5) will also be united to his resurrection for eternal life (Jn. 5:29). "Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt. 13:43).

2. "LET US NOT GROW TIRED OF DOING GOOD"

Christ's resurrection enlivens earthly hopes with the "great hope" of eternal life, planting the seed of salvation in our present time. Bitter disappointment at shattered dreams, deep concern for the challenges ahead and discouragement at the poverty of our resources, can make us tempted to seek refuge in self-centeredness and indifference to the suffering of others. Indeed, even our best resources have their limitations: "Youths grow tired and weary, the young stumble and fall" (Is. 40:30). Yet God "gives strength to the weary, he strengthens the powerless… Those who hope in the Lord will regain their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles; though they run they will not grow weary, though they walk they will never tire (Is. 40:29, 31). The Lenten season calls us to place our faith and hope in the Lord (1 Pet. 1:21), since only if we fix our gaze on the risen Christ (Heb. 12:2) will we be able to respond to the Apostle's appeal, "Let us never grow tired of doing good" (Gal. 6:9).

Let us not grow tired of praying. Jesus taught us to "pray always without becoming weary" (Lk. 18:1). We need to pray because we need God. Thinking that we need nothing other than ourselves is a dangerous illusion. If the pandemic has heightened the awareness of our own personal and social fragility, may this Lent allow us to experience the consolation provided by faith in God, without whom we cannot stand firm (Is. 7:9). No one attains salvation alone, since we are all in the same boat, amid the storms of history; and certainly no one reaches salvation without God, for only the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ triumphs over the dark waters of death. Faith does not spare us life's burdens and tribulations, but it does allow us to face them in union with God in Christ, with the great hope that does not disappoint, whose pledge is the love that God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:1-5).

Let us not grow tired of uprooting evil from our lives. May the corporal fasting to which Lent calls us fortify our spirit for the battle against sin. Let us not grow tired of asking for forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, knowing that God never tires of forgiving. Let us not grow tired of fighting against

concupiscence, that weakness which induces to selfishness and all evil, and finds in the course of history a variety of ways to lure men and women into sin. One of these is addiction to the digital media, which impoverishes human relationships. Lent is a propitious time to resist these temptations and to cultivate instead a more integral form of human communication made up of "authentic encounters," face-to-face and in person.

Let us not grow tired of doing good in active charity towards our neighbors. During this Lent, may we practice almsgiving by giving joyfully (2 Cor. 9:7). God who "supplies seed to the sower and bread for food" (2 Cor. 9:10) enables each of us not only to have food to eat, but also to be generous in doing good to others. While it is true that we have our entire life to sow goodness, let us take special advantage of this Lenten season to care for those close to us and to reach out to our brothers and sisters who lie wounded along the path of life (Lk. 10:25-37). Lent is a favorable time to seek out – and not to avoid – those in need; to reach out – and not to ignore – those who need a sympathetic ear and a good word; to visit – and not to abandon – those who are lonely. Let us put into practice our call to do good to all, and take time to love the poor and needy, those abandoned and rejected, those discriminated against and marginalize.

3. "IF WE DO NOT GIVE UP, WE SHALL REAP OUR HARVEST IN DUE TIME"

Each year during Lent we are reminded that "goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day." Let us ask God to give us the patient perseverance of the farmer (Jas. 5:7), and to persevere in doing good, one step at a time. If we fall, let us stretch out our hand to the Father, who always lifts us up. If we are lost, if we are misled by the enticements of the evil one, let us not hesitate to return to God, who "is generous in forgiving" (Is. 55:7). In this season of conversion, sustained by God's grace and by the communion of the Church, let us not grow tired of doing good. The soil is prepared by fasting, watered by prayer, and enriched by charity. Let us believe firmly that "if we do not give up, we shall reap our harvest in due time" and that, with the gift of perseverance, we shall obtain what was promised (Heb. 10:36), for our salvation and the salvation of others (1 Tim. 4:16). By cultivating fraternal love towards everyone, we are united to Christ, who gave his life for our sake (2 Cor. 5:14-15), and we are granted a foretaste of the joy of the kingdom of heaven, when God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

May the Virgin Mary, who bore the Saviour in her womb and “pondered all these things in her heart” (Lk. 2:19), obtain for us the gift of patience. May she accompany us with her maternal presence, so that this season of conversion may bring forth fruits of eternal salvation.