

Feb. 24, 2019

# ***Lent*: The reward of suffering**

The other day I decided to pick up my old guitar and sing a little song. First I was trepidatious, singing barely above a whisper. My voice slowly rose, and suddenly I was singing like I had never sung before, loud, without fear, without worry! It felt great! *Freeing!* The words flowed like cool, fresh water in a slow mountain stream. Sure, there were a few rocky out-croppings in the refrain, some stomach-churning microscopic parasites swimming in my melody, yet the words continued to flow like ... like, well, you know — like what I said earlier, the water thing.

Then, after the third verse, someone shouted from outside: “HEY MYERS, I KNOW WHAT YOU CAN GIVE UP FOR LENT!”

*What the ...?* How rude! The nerve of the guy! If my cats ever come back, I’m sure they’d agree with me!

As this sacred time of Lent approaches, I’ve been giving a lot of thought as to what to give up. (Singing isn’t among them. I like to see the effect of my singing on living creatures. It’s like a science experiment. Ever seen a cat put kitty litter in its ears? I have.)

I have a handful of guilty pleasures, such as the ice coffee drink I have every morning for breakfast. And the cheap iPad knock-off on which I peruse the internet nearly every night as I lay in bed. My wife will be reading a thick history text, and I’m watching a video on how to rebuild an engine. Or maybe an old Rocky and Bullwinkle cartoon. It’s much more likely I’m watching an old Rocky and Bullwinkle cartoon. Like, 100 percent more likely. I don’t know why I even mentioned the engine. When it comes to rebuilding things, all the king’s horses and all the king’s men are geniuses compared to me, yet we all remember what happened when Humpty fell to his untimely death (RIP HD).

But enough about flying squirrels and squished egg-people. I was discussing Lent.

When it comes to my nightly iPad perusal, sometimes when I put it away and turn out the light, I think to myself (because it’s impossible to think to someone else), “Boy, I can’t wait for Lent so I can stop looking at that darn thing!” Is there some rule that says I have to wait for Lent? I asked our local theologian. He replied, “Tell me this is a joke and you’re not really the editor of our diocesan newspaper.” Then I heard a deep sigh and the phone went dead. I get that a lot.

Bishop John told me some time ago (in so many words) that a Lenten sacrifice done to lose weight isn’t a Lenten sacrifice at all. It’s a diet. Lent is about giving up something that pulls at your heart, not your waistline. It should be something that calls to mind Christ’s incredible suffering.

If Jesus’s only pain was in giving up doughnuts and spending more time on the Stairmaster, I don’t think it would have had the same ... *punch*. You know what I mean?

So, here’s what I’m doing for Lent. I *am* going to give up the iPad. But instead of just reading any one of a thousand spy novels I have on the shelf, I’m going to read a book on the life of Christ written by a priest I admire. And then I’m going to take advantage of a wonderful gift God has given me that I’ve ignored for several years: the gift of the desire to paint and draw. It won’t be for the outcome, but for the journey. It will be a meditation. A prayer of thanks.

And, yes, I’m going to give up that morning coffee. Not because it’s bad for me, which it is. I fully plan to start it back up again after Easter. I crave the stuff like the Energizer Bunny craves batteries, and giving it up will be far from easy. (By the way, congrats to the Energizer Bunny for winning his lawsuit. There was zero proof he was *Duracelling* while on a recent trip to Europe.)

And I’m going to try the 40-day challenge. Each day I’m going to prayerfully find something I own that I can give to the poor. Not just old shirts or pants that no longer fit my horizontally-challenged belly, but good shirts. That fit. Good shoes. Coats. I’m certain my wife will agree, and won’t mind me giving away her good clothes and shoes, too, among other things of hers.

My wife just read my column in progress. I would like to humbly apologize for my preceding statement, and I have no intention of giving away my wife's things. This statement was in no way coerced by my wife, who is my superior in every conceivable way. Signed, David S. Myers

There's furniture ... and framed pictures. I'm sure the big-eyed kids will find a good home. And the velvet John Wayne. And great-Uncle Phil.

Lenten abstinence isn't entirely unselfish on our part. There's a certain joy in doing without. An emotional and spiritual cleansing. It allows us to focus more on what we should be thinking more about each and every day, not just during Lent.

If you can find that great Lenten focus, you'll discover that you prefer one over the other, possibly well beyond Lent. That's the gift! That's the wonderful reward brought to you by our Loving Lord.