

Are you religious...or Are you Christ-like?
2 Lent C

Self examination and repentance are the first parts of observing a holy Lent. These are among the first of several actions implored of us in the Ash Wednesday liturgy. You can read these admonitions again on page 265 of the prayer book.

Certain words and phrases from this Sunday's lessons bring out the actions of Lent. The apostle Paul writes of being transformed by the Savior from a body of humiliation to His glorious body. He is sad that there are those who no longer imitate Christ or Paul, but traded such glory for shame. Self examination and repentance would have made the difference in their lives. The apostle is trying to bring out the best in his followers. He does not want what happened to these people to happen to the rest of the church.

In the gospel Jesus tells the Pharisees that he has nothing to fear from that "fox" Herod. As crazy and sly an animal that Herod was, Herod would not prevent Jesus from finishing His work. Even the city of Jerusalem, that had the reputation for killing God's prophets, would not keep Jesus from being the "hen" that gathers her brood though His own would reject Him.

Our Savior examined His life and knew who He was and the path He had to follow. Paul examined his life, and grew in faith to be the cornerstone of the missionary church. The apostle Paul boldly used himself as a model for what it meant to be a disciple of Christ. Paul's life was transformed by the Savior and focused on bringing others to faith.

Socrates once said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." He could not conceive living if he could no longer pursue the truth using the tool of contemplation and examination.

There are also tools such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator that help us examine our preferences on how we process information and make decisions. But using tools to examine yourself is only the first step. *What brings out the best in a person then?* After the surface data is examined, the results must be deeply absorbed and contemplated to evoke a desire to change. That is the hardest part for most people. To face their "inner selves" honestly.

Jesus did not need any such tools. He had the ability to reveal what was inside Himself, as well as others.

One of the best tools for self examination I have seen is something I learned about while on vacation. I visited St. Augustine parish in Rhinelander and met the rector Fr. Dean Einerson. It was Ash Wednesday and after mass he invited me for coffee and later to his office where I learned how St. Augustine would be keeping the first week of Lent with a peculiar practice called Forgiveness Sunday. I had not heard of it and he showed me a leaflet he produced explaining what would happen and the importance of a personal rite of confession as an effective tool for spiritual

growth. I was impressed by its potential for self examination but did they actually do this?

At first I wondered how on earth these Anglo-Catholics would pull this type of thing off. After all, Anglicans are a private lot and we are most comfortable with the more impersonal communal rite found in the general confession. It reminded me how intimate worship can be when members of Trinity wash one another's feet during Maundy Thursday liturgy. Fr. Dean, who describes himself as Orthodox Anglican, told me, "It all depends on what you believe."

The leaflet described how after the general confession and absolution the congregation is asked to come to the center aisle. The Eucharistic ministers and acolytes are at the head of the line and the priest stands in the center of the aisle. After the priest explains what to do, the first person stands in front of the priest and each clasps the other person's arms. The priest will then say, "Forgive me, a sinner." And the person in front of him replies, "God forgives you and so do I." He and the priest then repeat the exchange. The person in line then goes to the left of the priest and the next person comes up to the priest. They exchange the acclamation as before but then the first and second persons also exchange. And on it goes.

No hugs are exchanged; only a modest bow so as not to make a person uncomfortable. Personal confessions are inappropriate as well at this service. The latter is reserved for a prayer book rite with the priest called "reconciliation of a penitent." Those who are unable or do not come to the center aisle, the priest goes to them with the same exchange.

"Forgive me, a sinner." "God forgives and so do I." What kind of Lent might begin in congregations that practice this rite? Before making such a statement, might one have the desire towards self examination? We would certainly hope so.

Even when animosity is absent from our life, this teaching reveals to us that there are subtler ways of offending God's Love: indifference, selfishness, lack of interest in other people or any real concern for them. In short, the wall we erect around ourselves by being "polite" and "friendly" and making people like us; thinking we are fulfilling God's commandments. These are among the "things done and left undone" found in the general confession that we may fail to acknowledge. These are the tiny examples that no one sees...that don't register except with us. It is the in the realm of failing to love our neighbor as ourselves.

As God works a holy Lent in each of us, as we examine self and turn from these more subtle ways of sinfulness, may we never be ashamed to turn to one another and say, "Forgive me a sinner." And in return may we hear, "God forgives you, and so do I." These activities lead to spiritual growth and make us worthy of Christ's sacrifice. May we take them to heart. Amen