

SPIRITUAL LIFE

First Sunday in Lent

By Fr. Bob

Is there any purpose to pain? Any advantage to adversity? Any solace in suffering? "Don't be discouraged, Charlie Brown, Charlie Brown," Schroeder says. "These early defeats help to build character for later in life."

"For what later in life?" ask Charlie Brown.

"For more defeats!" replies Schroeder.

Charlie Brown then invests in five cents worth of Lucy's psychiatric help. At first, her advice sounds a bit more sophisticated: "Adversity builds character," she says. "Without adversity a person could never mature and face up to all the things in life!"

"What things?" he asks.

"More adversity!" she says.

And then there is the story:

A boy was consistently coming home later from school. There was no good reason for his tardiness, and no amount of discussion seemed to help. Finally, in desperation the boy's father sat him down and said, "The next time you come home later from school you are going to be given bread and water for your supper—and nothing else. Is that clear, son?"

The boy looked straight into his father's eyes and nodded. He understood perfectly.

A few days later the boy came home even later than usual. His mother met him at the door but didn't say anything. His father met him in the living room, but he didn't say anything either.

That night, however when they say down together at table, the boy's heart sank down to his feet. His father's plate was full with food, and his mother's plate was filled with food. But his own plate contained only a single slice of bread. Next to his plate was a lonely glass of water.

The boy's eyes stared first at the bread, then at the glass of water. This was the punishment his parents had warned him about. To make it worse, tonight he was absolutely starving.

The father waited for the full impact to sink in, then quietly took the boy's plate and placed it in front of himself. He took his own plate and put it in front of the boy.

The boy understood what his father was doing. His father was taking upon himself the punishment that he, the boy, had brought upon himself by his own delinquent behavior. Years later, that same boy recalled the incident and said, "All my life I've known what God is like by what my father did that night."

We begin this Lenten Journey by looking again at Jesus in the wilderness. Once again we witness that Jesus began his ministry of healing and loving, his miraculous ministry of making people whole and helping them realize themselves to be the children of God, by confronting his own demons, by strengthening himself by looking deeply at who He was. Jesus begins His ministry by looking deeply within to know how he can be all that he can possibly be. As always, Jesus is the prototype for us. We as daughters and sons of the same God are called upon to also heal, to also make whole, to greatly love. And we ourselves cannot do this until we know who we are.

And the scripture for this First Sunday in Lent tells us some important things about ourselves.

In the book of Genesis we are reminded that God has covenanted with us. We are not alone. And because we need reminders of that, because we often might feel alone and floating and disconnected, God tells Noah and us that there will be many signs of the connection we have - we can look to the sky, we can look at the beauty of creation, we can look at the blessings in our lives - but we need to look. We need to face solidly the fact of who we are and where we have been called. There are signs of that - but we need to open our eyes - we need to be aware - we need to remember.

And then the author of the letter to Peter tells us that the jumping off point, the catapult, as it were, to what we do is our Baptism. Too often we look at our Baptism as a cute moment dressed in white! But in fact it is the line of demarcation - it is the moment that should make all the difference. It is like Jesus' 40 days in the desert that moves him on to healing and loving. Our Baptism, which we need to renew continually, is the heart of who we are - and it should define us.

We begin this Lenten journey, our 40 days. We need to look deeply at what defines us and remember who calls us.

We look at this dirt - our symbol - nothing more basic in our lives than the dirt that surrounds us and helps us be nourished and helps us build and helps us grow.

Let's look this week at the things that help us see clearly who we are - maybe it is adversity that defines us, our relationships, or conflict or blessing.

But at the heart of it we need to look, be aware, be awake. We can't come to Easter asleep! We can't be healing, loving children of God and be groggy too! We need to be emboldened and invigorated and ready to proclaim the reign of God, the reality of the covenant, the reality of God's love to all about us.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Genesis 9: 8-15

1 Peter 3: 18-22

Mark 1: 12-15

February 26, 2012

靈 修 生 活

悔 改 、 信 從 福 音

張 春 申

四旬期歷史悠久，第三世紀已經開始，爲了準備復活慶典。第七世紀以來，四旬期特別紀念耶穌在曠野中的獨居生活。本主日我們誦讀的福音便是有關這件事蹟。總之在四旬期內，教會要求信友在自己的生活中，注意一連串的重要事項，值得我們今天提醒一下。

首先，四旬期是在聖灰禮儀那天開始；司鐸拿祝聖過的灰在教友額上劃上十字聖號。灰是懺悔和贖罪的記號，所以司鐸劃十字聖號時，跟著說：「人啊！你要記著你原是灰土，將來還要歸於灰土。」或者說：「你們悔改，信從福音」。這都表明四旬期是一個改除惡習、滌除罪過、洗心革面、痛改前非的階段。爲了達到這個目的，古代教友在四旬期內，除了主日，每天嚴守大齋，所以傳統上四旬期又稱爲封齋期。雖然我們今天誦讀的馬爾谷福音並沒有說耶穌在曠野中守齋，可是瑪竇和路加兩部福音都清楚說明耶穌四十天守齋。那就讓我們在四旬期內，特別注重一些克己精神吧！當代教會爲了時代的需要，不再嚴格規定教友在四旬期守齋的義務，不過同時它要求大家爲了效法曠野中守齋的耶穌，也爲了每人自己在天主面前承認罪過，最後也爲了有罪的人類團體，自動自發刻苦補贖。可能不少教友只須更有意識地背著每天的十字架，跟隨耶穌，便是補贖。另外不少教友也許具體地在食、衣、住、行以及待人接物中，能夠有很多補贖的機會。

不過四旬期中，除了悔改補贖，還是一個實踐信從福音的時期，如同我們在今天福音中所聽到的。在古代，教會的洗禮常是在復活節前夕舉行的，而四旬期便是最後一段準備時期。事實上今天不少教區或者堂區，也是特別在四旬期準備領洗。可見這是那些慕道的人學習實踐信從福音的時期。但是信從福音的生活必須不斷地發展與成長的，雖然教會不斷注意教友的信仰培養，而四旬期是一年中特別加強的階段。每個堂區或教區具體怎樣做，我們不能討論。至少普世教會在這階段的禮儀，尤其彌撒中每天的讀經，是經過特殊編排的；使人在天主聖言中，認識天主的救恩計劃、耶穌基督的宣講天國、以及祂的死亡與復活。也許教友無法每天參與彌撒，或者也不能參加教區或堂區舉辦的講座。那麼四旬期中，必須自己在讀經與祈禱中，汲取培養信從福音的精神食糧了。

最後，四旬期中教會不只告訴大家基督信徒的生命是不斷受到挑戰的，而且要求大家有意識地在每人具體的生活中認清與接受挑戰。爲什麼呢？因爲耶穌自己在曠野中受到了撒殫的試探。撒殫是阻人悔改與拒絕信從福音的惡勢力。它先在耶穌準備宣講時試探祂；事實上在耶穌傳教時，撒殫繼續在耶穌四週的聽眾中試探他們。耶穌不斷的施行驅魔奇跡，正是表示祂繼續勝過撒殫。而我們今天的基督信徒，只要仔細思考與探索，便可發現在自己的周圍，各種不同的惡勢力在試探我們。金錢、名譽、權威等等都可能是撒殫惡勢力的來源，用來試探我們對基督的忠貞。那麼四旬期內，讓我們反省一下自己的生活，以強有力的信仰，制勝撒殫的誘惑。

總之，四旬期是禮儀年中天主施恩的階段，讓我們悔改、補贖、培養信從福音的生活，這樣可以勝過惡勢力的試探，接納天國的臨近。

摘自「妙音送長風」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 二 年 二 月 廿 六 日

創 9:8-15； 伯前 3:18-22； 谷 1:12-15