

❧ Other Voices ❧

Observing Lent can help us enter the fullness of God. In the broadest sense, Lent re-enacts Jesus' turn toward Jerusalem and his turn toward the suffering that culminates at the cross. It is a season of preparation for Holy Week and Easter, and in the early church it was a time to prepare catechumens before their baptism on Easter.

SCOTT WAALKES, *The Fullness of Time in a Flat World: Globalization and the Liturgical Year* (2010)

O Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth, vain curiosity, lust for power, and idle talk. But give to me Thy servant a spirit of soberness, humility, patience, and love. O Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults and not to condemn my brother; for blessed are Thou to the ages of ages. Amen.

THE PRAYER OF ST. EPHRAIM, for the weekday offices of Lent in The Lenten Triodion, translated by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (1978)

On Ash Wednesday we are reminded that the only fast pleasing to God is one that fosters justice and wholeness for the community and the oppressed. The church must become a community of justice that cares for the poor, for dislocated workers, and for unhappy "consumers" if it is to have any hope of pointing the world to the wholeness and fullness that sustain our hope.

SCOTT WAALKES, *The Fullness of Time in a Flat World: Globalization and the Liturgical Year* (2010)

People think it's strange to like Lent. It is, after all, a penitential season, and who enjoys penitence? The very word penitence brings to mind images of monks sitting in dark rooms wearing hair shirts. Feeling penitent sounds bad enough, but actually *liking* Lent seems to verge on masochism. It sounds as if one enjoys scrutinizing the past, dragging out every misdeed, and wallowing in guilt for six weeks.

However, Lent is not all about penitence or misdeeds or guilt. It is a time of introspection, true, but its ultimate purpose lies beyond penitence. In essence Lent serves as our annual invitation to come closer to God. It

provides a time to look at our lives and ourselves, not so we may criticize ourselves more harshly but so we can identify the obstructions that keep us from God. What keeps us from feeling the presence of the divine in our every day? How do we hide from God, and why? Lent gives us a chance to look at such obstructions and to move them gently away so that we can come closer to the Love that gives us life, the Love whose triumph we will celebrate on Easter morning.

SARAH PARSONS, *A Clearing Season: Reflections for Lent* (2005)

The starting point for the early church was this awareness of the abyss of sin inside each person, the murky depths of which only the top few inches are visible. God, who is all clarity and light, wants to make us perfect as he is perfect, shot through with his radiance. The first step in our healing, then, is not being comforted. It is taking a hard look at the cleansing that needs to be done.

This is not condemnation, but right diagnosis.... Forgiveness of past sins doesn't cure the sickness in the heart that continues to yearn after more. We will remain sick until that healing begins, and it will be a lifelong process.

What a relief it is to admit this. Like the woman weeping at Jesus' feet, we have nothing more to conceal, no more self-justification, no more self-pity. We are fully known, even in the depths that we ourselves cannot see, cannot bear to see. Instead of hoping that God will love us for our good parts and pass over the rest, we know that he died for the bad parts, and will not rest till they are made right. The depth of our sin proves the height of his love, a height we cannot comprehend until we realize how desperately we need it. We are fully loved, and one day will be fully healed, brought into God's presence without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN, *The Illumined Heart: Capturing the Vibrant Faith of Ancient Christians* (2001)

Contrary to what many think or feel a period of spiritual endeavor (during Lent, perhaps, or while taking part in a retreat) is a time of joy because it is a time for coming home, a period when we can come back to life. It should be a time when we shake off all that is worn and dead in us in order to become able to live, and to live with all the vastness, all the depth and all the intensity to which we are called. Unless we understand this quality of joy, we shall make of it a monstrous, blasphemous caricature, when in God's very name we make our life a misery for ourselves and for those who must pay the cost for our abortive attempts at holiness.

METROPOLITAN ANTHONY, *Meditations on a Theme: A Spiritual Journey* (1971)

How sad that people misunderstand the significance of the lenten spring. How distressing that so many take this time “given by our God, the crucified Christ” as a season for sentimental devotions, anxious introspections and pietistic pseudo-sufferings “together with Jesus.” And how depressing that others naturalize and rationalize the time with tepid explanations about the psychosomatic benefits of abstinence with arguments drawn from one or another therapeutic theory. And how totally tragic that still others reject the whole affair, often with good reason because of its distortion, as a barbarous hangover from the dark ages to be radically rejected in these liberated and enlightened modern times.

The lenten spring is welcomed by Christians in the Church not as the time for self-inflicted agony or self-improving therapy. It is greeted as the sanctified season consecrated to the correction, purification and enlightenment of the total person through the fulfillment of the commandments of the crucified God. It is received as the time for battling with evil spirits and blossoming with the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). It is accepted as “the great and saving forty days” set apart for complete and total dedication to the things of God. It is the “tithe of the year” which tells us that all times and seasons belong to the Lord who has created and redeemed the world.

THOMAS HOPKO, *The Lenten Spring: Readings for Great Lent* (1983)

A journey, a pilgrimage! Yet, as we begin it, as we make the first step into the “bright sadness” of Lent, we see – far, far away – the destination. It is the joy of Easter, it is the entrance into the glory of the Kingdom.

ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN, *The Great Lent: Journey to Pascha* (2001)

At this point you may be saying, “You’re attaching too much significance to the Christian year. It is impossible for the discipline of the Christian year to accomplish so much for my spirituality.” This objection has validity if the Christian year is seen as an end in itself. However, if we see the Christian year as an instrument through which we may be shaped by God’s saving events in Christ, then it is not the Christian year that accomplishes our spiritual pilgrimage but Christ himself who is the very content and meaning of the Christian year.

ROBERT E. WEBBER, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (2004)