

THE OTHER SIDE OF LENT

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The coming of Lent is not a cold reminder that we are locked in sin, in slavery to the devil, or in servitude to the prince of this world. Such a view of the Christian life is out of line with the promises of God.

There are Christians that truly seek counsel throughout the year, who follow advice, who count their blessings, and triumph in Christ. They do not forget that they are flesh and blood, that they sin, that they need to repent and seek forgiveness, but with all that, they accept God's wisdom, seek forgiveness, extend mercy to their brothers and sisters, and march with faith, knowing that they are God's children, destined to triumph through Christ.

For these Christians, Lent has two sides: the fast and self-examination that brings them even closer to God, and the exultation that, in their struggle, Christ strengthens them toward the greater goal, as he had promised, when he said, "I am with you always, until the end of the world."

The two sides are available to all baptized members, and each of us can select them. The alternative is to think of Lent as drudgery and lack of food.

Some Christians do not feel any urgency to seek advice or to be overly concerned with the refinements of the Gospel as it is expounded to them. In their own estimation, they sense that they are on safe ground. They make the sign of the cross when they are in difficulties, they occasionally help others, and, as long they can say a prayer in church, they consider their approach sufficient and reasonable. If they are given spiritual advice, they evaluate it and follow the portions that seem good to them.

Since this category of Christians includes the majority, we stand to gain insights from analyzing their perspective. Today's most prevalent bad habits are social interactions that involve inappropriate movies, nakedness, bad language, violence, drunkenness, drugs, selfishness, anger, etc.) under the umbrella of entertainment. The sincere Christian will make a decision to cut these out immediately and devote his time to constructive pursuits, such as helping in the house, study, prayer, helping others, etc. God will add his blessing.

Unconcerned individuals, on the other hand, may easily argue that the world owes them a living, that life is all work and no play, that one must relax, enjoy what society has to offer, and find a reason for persisting in the same activities. In such cases, the biblical principle is that human beings cannot mock God – they will reap what they sow. When it becomes obvious that God has lifted his protection, and sickness or some other disaster follows, then human beings begin to ask: Why did God allow this to happen? The answer is: Please look back and decide what you have sown.

As in the case of the prodigal son, one can come to himself and ask: In which category of Christians do I wish to be? If one is given the chance to go back, he or she should be grateful for the opportunity to do this. It is mercy from a loving Father, and it is a rare chance for a new response.

God's Lent has two sides. It can be a drudge of going without, or a spiritual song of victory in Christ. All can be blessed, and we can begin with the truth that "all things are possible with God."