

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Feb 11th 2015

One week from today is Ash Wednesday, beginning a six week season of allowing ourselves to be more aware of God's saving grace in our lives. For each one of us, God has a gift for us during the season of Lent. All we have to do is prepare our hearts for that gift.

Today's gospel passage comes just after Jesus, exasperated by the Pharisees, scolds them: "How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition!"

They have gotten so caught up in the externals of their religion that they forget about the people they could be serving.

Jewish laws about food were complex and revered. Jesus says that rather than worry about what goes into our mouths, what really counts is what comes out of our hearts: evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly.

I'm pretty good at skipping the murder and adultery categories, but I'm not so sure about envy, arrogance and folly. Maybe this is the year to look at Lent in a new way. There have been years when I "gave something up" for Lent – like chocolate or beer. But maybe this year, we could think of new ways to love our families even better. What if I gave up gossip for these weeks? If I take the time to examine my heart and see that I don't always treat my spouse with loving care, changing my behavior might be a much better focus for Lent than avoiding beer.

I'm not suggesting that we not give something up for Lent. In fact, I am suggesting that we reflecting on what we give up. It may help to look at it in a more positive way: What do I need to change about myself to free myself and open my heart more to God?

How often am I selfish or jealous? How often do I judge others harshly? Can I be more patient with my children and less abrupt to my co-workers? I suspect I would be better off eating chocolate (something that goes into my mouth) and focusing this Lent on holding off on my arrogance and judgments of others (something from deep in my heart).

The God who loves us so endlessly, is waiting for us with joy this Lent, with a great gift for each of us. All we need to do is ask for it every day, and that will help us get ready for Lent.

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