

A Different Kind of Lent This Year

By Fr. Glenn McDonald, CSB

Wednesday, February 17th is Ash Wednesday and the start of the Lenten season. When Lent rolls around, we are invited to ask ourselves, “Ok, what can I give up this year, so that I can create room for God in my life?” However, after being in a pandemic for about a year and with a few months still to go, my first response is, “Lord, I have no more things to give up!”

The Lent of 2021 will not be about giving up things, because we have already been doing so for almost a year now. Perhaps this Lenten season we are invited to ponder what we have received? Allow me give you an example.

A family that I am quite close to shared with me how the pandemic had impacted them: Wednesday night soccer has been cancelled, vacation plans were moved to the backyard, and visits to grandma became Facetime calls. In other words, their regular routine was derailed and they were understandably sad about it.

Then came a statement that I did not expect. “Once the pandemic began, we started to get to know the other families in the neighborhood.” At first I thought I had misheard the conversation — we were standing six feet apart with masks on. “Yes, Father. We have gotten to know our neighbors and made friends in the neighbourhood after having lived here several years. It has been a great blessing.” I must confess: I was surprised to learn this. How could anyone feel blessed during a pandemic?

During my drive home, I pondered what my friends had shared with me, and wondered: what have I received?

So far, I have been extremely fortunate. The pandemic has been only an inconvenience for me. In contrast, others have had a very difficult time and suffered greatly: jobs have been lost, relationships have suffered, and family members have died and gone to Heaven.

For many, there will be no thanksgiving that flows from the pandemic. Their loss has far outweighed any gain. I am somewhat embarrassed to think of how fortunate I have been relative to the sufferings of others.

And yet, when I ponder the last twelve months, the most meaningful moments I have experienced have been listening to others share about their losses.

There is a special and holy connection that is formed when others share their pain with us. Despite the tremendous poverty they feel, they give us a priceless gift of sharing their deepest feelings and memories — a fragile intimacy that can be treasured long after the pandemic has ended.

The Lent of 2021 will be unique — focused more on sharing than giving up. If you are like me, and have only been inconvenienced this past year, let us give thanks to God for that. For those of you who have suffered a painful loss, I encourage you to share your experience with others. Being vulnerable is rarely easy, but your loss is something you can bless others with. I know that I have been blessed by what others have shared with me.