

Giving up hypocrisy for lent

Among the critical calls of the church in the community is always to remind everyone to live a humble life characterised with virtue and integrity.

Virtue is a trait or quality deemed to be morally good and thus valued as a foundation of principle and good moral being. Personal virtues are characteristics valued as promoting collective and individual greatness.

Furthermore, integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles, or moral uprightness. It is generally a personal choice to hold oneself to consistent moral and ethical standards.

Approaching Lent with this in mind, and in gratitude to God's redemptive love, we can change our world.

To this end, the product of that life of virtue and integrity, must be a conscious life of justice by all of us and for all people of God.

In this season of Lent that began on February 26 and ends on April 9, let us remember the prophetic encouragement: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God" (Micah 6;8).

When we humbly exercise prayerful fasting and abstinence in this season, the critical purpose to keep in mind what the prophet Isaiah said: "to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke. To share food with the hungry and to provide wanderer with shelter; when you see the naked, clothe them and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood.

"The people who observe fasting in prayer this way will see their light breaking forth like the dawn. They will witness the healing of their land and families. Their righteousness will go before them and that the glory of the Lord will be their guard and they will call upon God, and He will answer. They will cry for help, and He will respond, here I am".

Our society and country will be healed if we as a community take prayer and fasting as seriously as spelled out in Isaiah. We need to pray for the downfall of greedy corrupt leaders; the end of religious heretics and opinionated bigotry in our communities; the side-lining of self-serving people drunk with power; and the bringing of criminals like rapists and child killers swiftly to justice.

Walking humbly with God and thus acting justly and in loving mercy requires all of us to have a heart open to listening, feeling and thinking for one another.

All the vulnerable, such as the elderly, orphans, widows, children, must be loved and cared for.

Living a virtuous life and with integrity means we do not merely listen to the word of God, as such will mean self- deception.

What is required is that we listen and do as God commands. St James says anyone who listens to the word and does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away immediately forgets what he looks like.

We should thus be humble in noting that fasting is not just abstinence from certain pleasures, but more importantly the bad habits we stop and the contribution we make to society as a sign of loving and rededication to the Lord.

That is our commitment sealed with a sign of Cross with inscription, *“Remember o man that you are the dust and dust you will return... Repent and believe in the Gospel.”*

We must therefore continue to set our sails on the course that enables us to become women and men of the highest character and integrity.

Every one of us, however insignificant we believe ourselves to be in the greater scheme of things, (through status, age, race, etc.), has to be consciously aware that he or she is a game changer, with historical influence in community and in creation. Remember the great saying: “a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”

Warren Wiersbe emphasizes that "we must be careful to protect our own personal integrity. When integrity goes, then character starts to decay. When character goes, we've lost everything important.

“No matter what you may possess — money, popularity, talent, friends — if you don't have character, you don't have anything. But character depends on integrity.”

People with integrity are people who are honest with themselves, with others, and with God. They don't wear masks and they don't waste energy pretending to be what they aren't. They're not afraid of what others may find out about them because they have nothing to hide.

The alternative to integrity is hypocrisy, and that eventually leads to duplicity — becoming two persons inside, neither of whom knows the other.

Without inner wholeness, we can't function successfully in life or enjoy all that God wants us to enjoy.

We must cultivate integrity. That means knowing God, God's forgiveness, God's truth, God's church, and God's love.

A blessed Lent to all people of God!

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