

LENT NEWSLETTER

LENT LEADS US TO BRUTAL HONESTY



The modern world has great difficulty dealing with sin and evil. In fact, the only time we seem to be able to talk about evil, deception and willful failure is when our politicians steal from the public purse, get involved with smoking crack and doing sexually inappropriate things with underage young people.

There is little willingness to be honest with ourselves. We live so well the barb of Jesus: "You are so good at seeing the tiny piece of dust floating in the eyes of your neighbor but you are blind

to the plank of wood floating within your own eye!"

The call of Lent is to move towards honesty. More and more our lives must become transparent to the goodness that is God himself.

Take this bulletin to reflect and discuss with your friend your struggles and insights about what it means to be brutally honest with whom you are. And then listen to how the Holy Spirit is moving you to greater honesty of soul and heart.

HOW TO USE THIS BULLETIN

We all have trouble with people who 'say it like it is.' They are too blunt! Their honesty sometimes hurts other people. Many times we just avoid such people.

In our spiritual lives we often are not 'out there.' Rather, we do not confront our own sinfulness, our selfishness and all the resentments that we hold. But we know from experience that if you do not name and take ownership of your black side, (i.e., your sinful attitudes) they will become the rudder that steers your sailboat.

Lent is opportunity. Hold your life to the scrutiny of the Word of God. Stand in honesty as the Word of God shows you a more honest way to live. Take responsibility for your sinful and negative attitudes that bring harm to your relationship with God, with your fellow human being and with your own soul.

The message this week is:
Be honest!



Unmasking the Great Deception

John Kavanaugh, S. J. of Saint Louis University

"The gift is not like the offense."

A wise old spiritual director in the British Isles is reported to have said, "There is a little bit of the fake in all of us."

If he was correct, his insight may have had something to do with original sin. The Eden story was, remember, a drama woven of pretense and cover-up. Adam and Eve were the first to bite on a big lie: the denial of our creaturely dependence.

We do seem to master the art of denial at an early age. Witness the clever words of the "innocent" toddler accusing someone on the other side of the room as the milk is spilled, "See what you made me do?" Soon after infancy, we invent playmates to blame for our own blunders. "Jimmy did it." As teenagers we imagine some pretense, some "aura," which will make up for the terrible

inadequacy we feel. A few put on the pose of the outsider, some play it hot, others stay cool. The cover of designer clothes helps, as an advertisement for Nike burbles, "Good clothes won't laugh at us behind our backs." Even facing marriage, some are hounded by the fear that a future spouse might find out what they are really like and then reject them.

We so much want to look good, to seem more intelligent or composed or virtuous than we are. We don roles: "Father Joe Relevant," "Sister Mary Renewal," "the perfect couple," "the success story," "the saint," "the picture of health."

"Looking good is everything," a chorus of consumer hucksters screams. Even the postmodern halls of academe have announced the inescapable fact that everything we do is a masquerade for strategies of privilege and pleasure. Pretense marks the "real world" of school corridors, unfriendly streets, and political platforms. Cover-ups not only bring down presidencies, they haunt everyday life. As Freud said, the major barrier to healing is the wounded person who asks for help but is secretly unwilling to face the truth that healing requires.

Is deception something we have to learn? Is it bred in the bones? Is it the fatal flaw of every human?

Adam and Eve, we are told, had almost everything. The only drawback was the fact that they were creatures of limit. They were good, but not God. They could have the fruit of every tree except the tree of limits, the tree of creatureliness.

It was their creaturehood that made them susceptible to the Lie.

Enter the serpent, that cunning beast, that lord of lies, who taunted their obedience and reliance on God. "Not any of the trees?" (No, they could have all the trees but one.) "Do you not want to live forever?" (But they already could eat of the tree of life.)

Ah, but the attraction of having no limits. To be God. To be self-sufficient, self-made. The pretense was attractive, desirable. The ruse looked so wise.

Thus sin entered the world, St. Paul writes, through one act: the lie of self-sufficiency. That was the offense.

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And it would be righted by one act as well: a life of utter truth. That was the gift.

The temptations the devil fed to Jesus were nothing other than delusions we all dream of in our longing for radical independence

"Become your own food." Be self-sufficient. Display your power. But Jesus refuses. God alone will be his food.

Show your stuff; muster your magic." Leap from the temple in full self-assurance. But Jesus will live by the word and power of God alone.

"Look out from the highest mountain and all will be given you, if you only give yourself to the Lie." But Jesus declines the self-adoration, reserving glory for the Lord our God alone.

The sin of the first humans was to reject the condition of humanness: splendid creatures, yet nonetheless dependent on God.

The gift of the new Adam was a total acceptance of humanness, an entering so deeply into our limits, and even into the effects

of our sin, that there would be no other reality to his consciousness than abandonment to the will of the one who sent him.

So what's left for us, we who are neither God nor savior? Well, to receive the truth is a great and difficult thing. That is why true confession is such a marvelous sacrament (and so rare). If we just acknowledge the simple truth of our limits and our sins before God and Christ's people, we reverse the offense of Eden and enter the gift of Calvary.

In acknowledging the lies of our own egotisms, of the great injustices of the world, of the excesses in appetite, of the woundings in relationship, of all the mean divisions in the church, we drop once again the heavy mask of deception. It falls from our faces, revealing our need.

We are sinners, dear friends. If we do not know that, we suffer a poverty of self-knowledge. But if we yield to the truth, not only that we are creatures, but that we are in sore need of redemption, we are newly free, open to love.

We reverse the big lie of Eden as we embrace the big truth of Gethsemane, now able to say with the one who graced our fallen state, "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

IT'S ONLY

L: It is when you give, Lord,

That we can receive.

R: It's at the time of your gift, Lord,

That we must be attentive.

L: It's in an attitude of openness, Lord,

That we must wait for you.

R: It's in the assurance of your presence, Lord,

That we must commit ourselves

L: It's in your faithfulness, Lord, That we must abide.

R: It's in your humility, Lord, That we must walk,

L: It's in your love, Lord,

That we must love.

R: It's in your joy, Lord,

That we must rejoice.

L: It's in your cross, Lord,

That we must journey.

R: It's in your victory, Lord,

That we are to triumph.

L: It is with you, Lord,

That we must belong to the Father.

R: It's in your Spirit, Lord,

That we must take delight.

L: It's in your Mother, Lord,

That we must say "Yes."



QUESTIONS TO CHEW OVER THIS LENT

No one can be healed of their woundedness if they will not touch their blackness, the resentments that fester within them and their downright selfishness. There can be no spiritual healing if we do not take ownership of our own shortcomings, our sinfulness and the way we can rationalize our selfishness.

To deny our blackness (i.e., our sinfulness) is to go to the doctor with acute pain.

The doctor asks: "Where does it hurt?"

You, the patient: "It hurts."

Doctor: Where?

"It just hurts, can't you see how much pain I am in?"

This is going nowhere!

The same with our Lenten journey. If we do not bring before God our own sinfulness the Holy Spirit is hobbled. We can block our own spiritual

healing. We can block our own conversion to greater life and grace.

Lent is a opportunity to lay before God what is the strongest stumbling block in our life. Are we clinging to demanding that it always be done 'my way?' Are we fighting God and the way that God is moving our life?

Are we always making excuses to avoid helping the poor of this world, especially the poor right around us? We may not do very much that is wrong but we might be doing very little of what is good.

Lay before Jesus the stumbling blocks that hinders the working of God's grace in your life. How honest can you be with Jesus?



*A LENTEN PRAYER
by Walter Brueggemann*

Loss is indeed our gain

*The pushing and the shoving of the
world is endless*

We are pushed and shoved.

*And we do our fair of pushing and
shoving*

in our great anxiety.

*And in the middle of that
you have set down your beloved
suffering son*

*who was like a sheep led to
slaughter*

who opened not his mouth.

We seem not able,

*so we ask you to create spaces in
our life*

*where we may ponder his suffering
and your summons for us to suffer
with him,*

*suspecting that suffering is the only
way to come to newness*

*So we pray for your church in these
Lenten days,*

*when we are driven to denial-not
to notice the suffering,*

not to engage it,

not to acknowledge it.

*So be that way of truth among us
that we should not deceive
ourselves.*

*That we shall see that loss is indeed
our gain.*

*We give you thanks for that
mystery from which we live.*