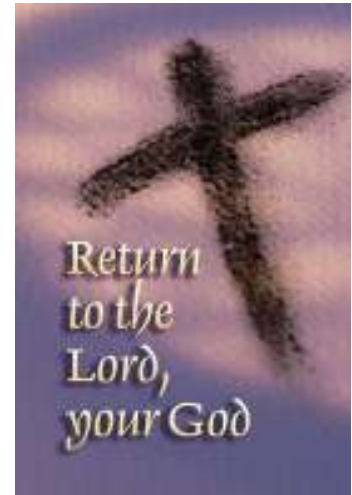


"Lent comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy." - Pope Francis

We begin the season of Lent receiving the symbolic gesture of the imposition of ashes on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday. This reminds us that *"We are dust and to dust we will return."* (Genesis 3:19). They are an outward sign of an inward repentance and grief as we become aware of our state of self disposition. Facing our life reality in the shadow of Christ's Cross, enables us to purify ourselves and to experience the resurrection in a healthiest way.

Lent is a time for "giving things up" balanced by "giving to" those in need. The central question that guides our practice of Lent is highlighted in the reading from Joel 2: *How will I repent and return to God?* Matthew chapter 6 answers this question by highlighting very concrete disciplines that have the potential to loosen the grip of sin and compulsion in our lives, thus creating more space for God and for one another. As we reflect on this passage in light of the Lenten season, we ask ourselves:

- *How will I give? (v. 2, 3)*
- *How will I pray? (v. 5-13)*
- *Who do I need to forgive and from whom do I need to seek forgiveness? (v. 14, 15)*
- *How will I fast? What do I need to abstain from in order to create more freedom and space for God? (v. 16-18)*
- *Where is my treasure—really—as it is reflected in how I use my time, financial resources and energy? How do I relate with my own community members, in the wider community, with, my biological family members? Is there any specific way in which God is inviting me to "let go" of my attachment to some earthly treasure in order to invest in that which is eternal? (v. 19-21)*
- *How is the new life that we live with Christ different from the life we lived before?*



The path is different because it is the path of discipleship, of following Jesus. As we follow Jesus, we start to "look" more and more like Him; and as we look more like Him, we look less like the world.

The Gospel of Mark, chapter 8, verse 34 describes the discipleship so differently from the world, because it brings out a pivotal verse how to be a follower. It changes the way the world think. In Mark 8:27 it is like Jesus has finally come to the point where he is willing to ask the disciples to make a commitment. "Who do you think that I am? Peter, probably speaking for all twelve of them,

says, “We believe you are the Christ, the Messiah, God’s king who was to come into the world.” Jesus accepts Peter’s confession as true.

But then everything in the Gospel story changes. Jesus’ ministry becomes mostly private, not doing as many miracles, and primarily teaching the twelve disciples what it is like to live as disciples in God’s kingdom. In verse 8:34 Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”

If anyone wants to follow Jesus, to be his disciple he / she must do two things, “deny oneself” and “take up his / her cross.” When Luke tells this same story, he clarifies that we are to take up our cross “daily” (Luke 9:23). What does it mean? The answer to this question shows why the path is so different from the world.

To “deny” oneself means to say “No” to oneself and “Yes” to God. It is not talking about asceticism foregoing earthly possessions, fasting foods, ignoring the world and so on. To say it differently, the process of denial is “to humbly submit our will to God.” It is to go through life repeating the words that Jesus said the night before he died. When he was praying in the garden, he said to His Father, “Not my will but Yours be done.” (Matthew 6:10) What does it look like to live out this prayer? It invites us to search for ourselves and to let go something. What is that demands me to give up, is it my position, power, relationship, material things, pleasure, comfort and so on. Is it my own false belief, unforgiveness, past hurtful memories and affected emotion?

The path of discipleship is “not my will but yours.” It is humbly submitting my will to God’s will. Instead of getting angry, we realize that God is calling us to forgive even our enemies. A verse that is becoming more and more important to us is Paul’s instructions to the Church in Ephesus. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you” (Eph.4:32). When I am hurt, I am called to submit my will to God’s will and follow his example. This is what it means to “deny” oneself.

The Lord is giving us an opportunity to identify the thing that has become God in our lives and which does not allow us to give the first place to God in our lives.

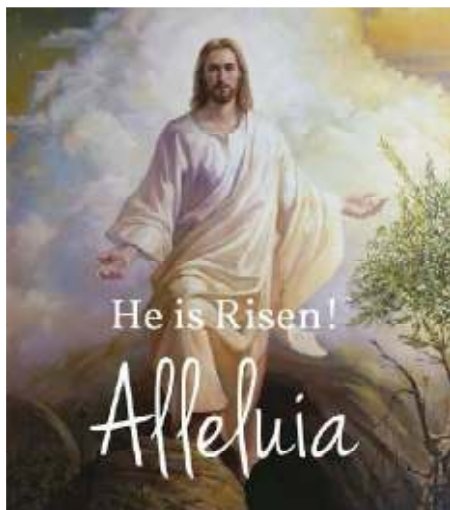
What does it mean to “daily take up your cross”? The cross was a horrid symbol of pain, shame, and death. A person hung on it, naked, until his skeletal structure collapsed and suffocated to death, without air and with his body drowning itself in its own fluids. Every day we are to live in such a way that it is apparent to everyone that we have died to ourselves, to our selfish ways and ambitions, and live for God. “If anyone of you wants to be My follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow Me” (NLT)

Life is a journey. God understands that over the years we have created habits of our heart that are not easily broken, and he is patient with us as we learn to walk the new path. Let us be patient like Him and embrace each other the way He embraced.

To get back to the original question, why is the new path of discipleship different? It’s because we have been changed. We now follow Jesus, and the new longings in our heart are to do His will, not our own.

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11, ESV). The path of discipleship is the path of joy, but it is also a path that is different.

There is no doubt that Lent requires something of us, but there can be no feasting without fasting. Entering into the Lenten discipline of giving up something in order to create more space for prayer is the fast that prepares us to fully enjoy the Feast of the Resurrection. Let us live the Lent, as an opportunity, not as a requirement. Let us live it as a joyful season. After all, it is meant to lead us into the Church’s spring time, a time when out of the darkness, repentant empowered people emerges. Let us be opened to God’s grace to make an inward journey identifying our own vulnerability; that which make us feel at home. The true joy and liberation comes in accepting our own brokenness.



Jesus' Resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. The gifts of the Master are these: freedom, life, hope, new direction, transformation, and intimacy with God. If the Cross was the end of the story, we would have no hope. But the cross is not the end. Jesus didn't escape from death; He conquered it and opened the way to heaven for all who will dare to believe. The truth of this moment, if we let it sweep over us, is stunning. He is the only way for us to intimately and spiritually connect with God again. “It is at Easter that Jesus is most human, and like all humans, he fails and is failed. His is not an all-powerful God, He is an all vulnerable God”. — Michael Leunig

Joining you in gratitude for Christ’s sacrifice and the joyful renewal it brings to all God’s children at this Easter season.

Wishing you a wonderful Easter

Yours sincerely

Sister M. Rubika A.C.
Provincial Superior