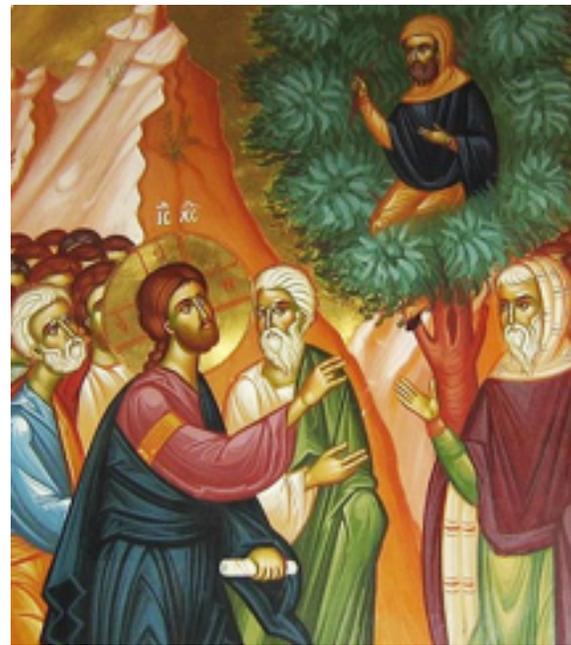


This is the spirit in which we are to enter into Lent, this is the spirit in which we are to live our lives, and for the Christian this should be a way of life, not something that we think about for an hour on Sunday – but should come naturally because we have “put on Christ” as we proclaim at our Baptism. In this context will we understand and be able to receive “eternal life” and only in this context the true meaning of resurrection is revealed.



If you listen carefully to the readings that immediately precede Lent, you will see a beautiful tapestry being woven reminding you of why it is that our God is so awesome. Beginning with the story Jesus calling to Zacchaeus to dine with him, the story of the Publican and the Pharisee followed by the reading that teaches us the true spirit of fasting, and finally the separation of the sheep from the goats.

Our life with Christ begins with an invitation. Once that invitation is accepted life will never be the same. Just as Zacchaeus climbed the sycamore tree so he could get a good look at Jesus as he was passing by, you and I often climb to the height of our own despair or trials and look for Jesus, once we choose not to give in to doubt or despair, there he is, where he always was, helping to carry us through, even though we did not recognize him. This first encounter with Jesus transformed the life of Zacchaeus forever and he recognized immediately that he was a child of God.

The first step of any relationship is accepting the **INVITATION**. Next Sunday we read the story of the Publican and the Pharisee, and if you and I are honest we can see both of these characters in ourselves. We all at times are pharisaical with regard to how we look at others or even live our own lives – these are the times “we don’t practice what we preach”, and we all at one time or another have been humbled to the point where we knew that there was no way we could go on with life without God’s help. Jesus reminds us that the sure way to a peaceful existence is to accept ourselves and our own truths; if we do this we are able to experience immediately the divine love that envelops us – God’s love which is unconditional. If God can accept us as we are, why is it so difficult for us to accept ourselves?

The next step in a good relationship is **DEPENDING ON EACH OTHER**. The following Sunday we hear the story of the prodigal son, so full of pride that he thought he could make it on his own. He learned quickly the “grass wasn’t so green on the other side of the fence” and agonized over how he could return home. All the time his father felt his pain and was sorrowful at his loss. Returning home the son realized that he had nothing to fear, that the love that was present there when he wandered away was always there, and having the courage to admit his weakness, his father’s loving embrace was stronger than ever. In good relationships we don’t say “I told you so,” when once is struggling for words to make amends – **WE ARE THE FRIST TO REACH OUT AND OFFER HEALING**.

As we move on to Meat fare Sunday we hear the true spirit of fasting. Jesus teaches that eating or abstaining from certain foods means nothing if it is not done with sincerity or if it holds no meaning. He tells us that when we choose to fast we

are not to let anyone know, we should groom ourselves and not go around moping and groaning “like the hypocrites do.” In all that we do there must be desire – an understanding that this action for me has spiritual significance, it is not just the mere following of a rule for the sake of the rule. As we mature in our relationships we learn to **SACRIFICE** with joy and expect nothing in return.

The final Sunday before entering into Lent is Cheese fare Sunday. On this Sunday we hear the story of the separating of the “sheep from the goats” on the day of Judgement. How do you think of yourself and your spiritual health? Jesus uses sheep and shepherds because the people of his day could relate to the story. Sheep are docile, not that intelligent even though they think they are, once wandering away they are easily lost; they need a lot of attention and care. Sound familiar? Goats on the other hand are stubborn and don’t care to listen to anyone. They will wander and quite frankly are happy to do so – they know everything and think they can go it better alone. Sound familiar? Where do you fit in? Did you know that the priests stole is a symbol of the lost sheep? It is a reminder to him that he is to go after the lost sheep and try to bring them home safely. Many priests when administering absolution will raise their stole over the head of the penitent while praying. This is to reassure them that they are back in the fold. They are safe now and will remain safe so long as they remain in the flock... for us this is our parish. In any relationship, if sacrifice is sincere the next natural progression is learning to help one another and to be quick to **OFFER FORGIVENESS AND TO SEEK FORGIVENESS**.