

Dear Friends,

When was the last time you did something bold, like going into the desert and fasting for 40 days and 40 night? Well, why not now? I'm not suggesting that any of us go to the extreme of desert dwelling this Lent, but I'd like to challenge all of us to do something bold by going beyond simply giving something up. Most of us have taken that path since we were kids, and though there can be a sense of pride at Easter when we boast that we hadn't had any chocolate, ice cream, beer or TV for 40 days, isn't there more to Lent than just giving something up?

I believe God wants to give us something during Lent. God wants to transform our lives, re-create them so that we can be freer to live like Christ. Without a doubt, it is easier to give something up, to exercise our willpower for 40 days to prove to ourselves and to God that we can do it. But what happens at the end of Lent? We usually return to what we gave up.

This Lent let's ask the deeper questions: "What is God inviting me to do? What is God challenging me to change?"

How do we know what God is asking? We begin knowing by listening to the stirrings in our hearts. Where are we feeling uncomfortable with the choices we've been making? With the things we've been doing? The Lord speaks to us in those moments of discomfort in our hearts.

Asking God to reveal what we need to change about ourselves requires some reflection. But we have time; this is just the first Sunday of Lent. So let's ask: "Lord, what pattern of behavior in my life needs changing? What do I need more of in my life? Patience? Selflessness? Gratitude? A more loving attitude toward my spouse, children, in-laws, co-workers, neighbor?" With a little reflection each of us can think of something that gets in the way of our being loving and self-sacrificing.

What would it cost us to change a behavior or behaviors? What if we decided to "give up" something destructive in life, like alcohol, anger, defensiveness, drugs, on-line friendships, over-eating, pornography, pride or resentment? As we reflect, we might realize that changing a particular way we live is a call from God and therefore we do not have to make the change alone. God is moving our hearts and God will help us to stay open to the grace being offered to us for change. He will give us the grace to cling to the Cross of Christ that saves us.

"O Cross of Christ, teach us that the rising of the sun is more powerful than the darkness of night. O Cross of Christ, teach us that the apparent victory of evil vanishes before the empty tomb and before the certainty of the Resurrection and the love of God which nothing can defeat, obscure or weaken" (Pope Francis). O Cross of Christ, save us.

Peace and blessings,

Father John