

I think there is some tendency to think of Lent as something dark and dreary, something to escape from as soon as possible or even avoid altogether. There is perhaps some tendency to say something like: well, I want good feelings, happy thoughts, thus no Lent for me, that is depressing.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The season of Lent presents to us, especially in the readings for weekday Mass, the most consoling words in this life and this world, namely our Lord's words of mercy. The most consoling words in the entire world, the most comforting words we can hear in this world, the greatest words we can hear in this life are:

- Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool (Is 1:18).
- None of the crimes [sins] he committed shall be remembered against him (Ez 18:22).
- You have cast all your sins behind My back (Is 38:17).

Many, if not most, times when people start looking for comfort and consolation, what they really want is some sort of affirmation for themselves, perhaps even affirmation in their sins, someone to tell them how good they are, that they don't need to change; God loves you just as you are, **period**. The problem with that last statement is the period at the end. It is true that God has some love for all of His creatures, even Satan; there is no hatred in God. The fact that He has some love even for Satan brings out that that truth (God has some love for all) is not enough for our salvation. There is tendency to say: Well, God loves me just as I am, therefore I don't have to change. This message does not come from our Lord.

A tactic used in temptation is to take something true and twist it; this is brought out in first temptation as well as the temptations of Christ. Covering up this truth has become a pandemic in our times, presenting a partial truth (God loves you no matter what) as if it is the full truth, thus leading to a false conclusion (Jesus loves you, period; i.e., you'll go to Heaven no matter what), is considered nice today. In fact, it is all too often considered impolite, condemnatory, and even false to point out the truth that God Himself has most clearly stated is the exact opposite; bringing out the fullness of truth is often called hatred today. If we were to paraphrase our Lord's words to address today's mentality it might be: man cannot live by sugar alone but from every word that comes from the mouth of God. This demand for constant sugar – affirmation of me no matter what – without substantial food cannot sustain life; it can only cover up disease temporarily, then (and thus) leading to death. This, we might say, is part of the modern “heresy of softness,” as well as man's great propensity for pride.

These words of our Lord's mercy – I will cast your sins behind My back, they shall not even be remembered, though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as wool is truly the “good news” of Revelation. They are the true words, and the *only* true words, of consolation and comfort in this life and this world. There is nothing greater that a person can hear and receive in this life and this world. However, they can only be received by the meek and humble of heart. Only a humble person can hear these words and weep in grateful affection. Only the humble man can know he has separated himself from God, has excluded himself from our Lord's table, and has been cast out; there is nothing for him except wailing and gnashing of teeth; his only desire is to be reconciled, to be readmitted to the house of his Father and his Father's children, to sit at table again with his Father and brothers and sisters. Then he hears these words: you will not only sit with us at table again, My son, but your sins will not even be remembered – not even remembered. Imagine if I could go to the table now but everyone glares at me because of my betrayal; I might be glad that I'm no longer outside, but there is still lack of union, still some separation, still pain of the offense. Our Lord says even that will be eliminated, you will sit at table and your offense will not even be remembered. How can I even express His goodness or my gratitude? All the humble man can do is shake his head and weep in gratitude at the goodness of His Father. These are the greatest words he can hear. They are words of restoration of full sonship, in spite of my offenses, in spite of my crimes against my Father and His family. Lent is not some dark and dreary time to avoid; Lent draws our attention to access to these greatest words in the world.

Draws attention to *access to* these greatest words, not an automatic reception of them. In each case our Lord first calls for conversion – if you enter into conversion, then your sins will not even be remembered and so on.

In the case where our Lord said: though your sins be as scarlet (etc), He *first* says: “Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow. Come now, let us set things right.”

Your sins shall not even be remembered... God *first* says: “***If*** the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, ***if*** he keeps all my statutes and does what is right and just, he shall surely live, he shall not die.”

Before our Lord said to Isaiah: “I will cast your sins behind My back,” we first hear Isaiah’s deep, heartfelt prayer of remorseful repentance, for example: “I am consigned to the gates of Sheol (a place of punishment, of suffering) for the rest of my years I said, I shall not see the Lord, the Lord in the land of the living.” So many have pridefully excused themselves from the need for repentance. Take note that these are the words of the Isaiah, *the* great prophet of the Old Testament, a true servant of the Lord.

Only a repentant person, like Isaiah, can receive these greatest words of our Lord (your sins will not even be remembered, I will cast them behind my back) much less rejoice in them. To promise God’s mercy without conversion is a lie. Conversion means a turning around. I have been following my own desires, my own will, doing whatever pleases me, going farther and farther away from God; then I stop and turn, turn away from this downhill slide, I am sorry for it (deep repentance), and strive to now turn back to the Lord.

Lent draws attention to reception of the greatest words a person can hear (e.g., your sins will not even be remembered) and the condition necessary to receive them: deep sorrow, repentance, conversion. But Lent does more than that, as indicated by other readings for Lent. Something has to trigger my sorrow for sin, my repentance, my conversion. What does that? It could be said that Lent is a preparation for Sacred Triduum – Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday (these are not part of Lent; Lent ends with the beginning of the celebration of our Lord’s Last Supper – i.e., on Holy Thursday), which is a full and solemn contemplation of our Lord’s great sacrifice. This is begun, however, in Lent, as reflected by the Scripture readings for Lent, as well Lenten practices. Last Wednesday the first reading was from the Book of Jeremiah. The first few verses were this: “The people of Judah and the citizens of Jerusalem said, “Come, let us contrive a plot against Jeremiah. It will not mean the loss of instruction from the priests, nor of counsel from the wise, nor of messages from the prophets. And so, let us destroy him by his own tongue; let us carefully note his every word.” Jeremiah is a prefigurement, here, of Jesus, this is what happened to Him as well. If you have ever experienced this sort of plotting and scheming you know painful it is. Or as I contemplate this plotting and scheming, maybe it is that I have done it myself.

The Gospel, for the same day as the reading from Jeremiah, was our Lord telling the Apostles that they were going to Jerusalem where He would be handed over, mocked, scourged, and crucified. What triggers repentance and conversion thus making a person capable of receiving the greatest words ever spoken? Well, there are a number of things: not the least of which is the grace of God; the virtue of humility is necessary, it allows the door to be opened. One practice, though, that is indispensable is meditation on our Lord’s Passion. The Stations of the Cross can be prayed any time but they are especially emphasized during Lent.

Lent draws attention to the sweetest words a person can possibly hear: your sins will not even be remembered, as well as to what is needed to be able to hear and receive those words with the deepest appreciation – namely conversion and repentance, real sorrow for sin. Lent aids in reaching that deep sorrow for my own personal sins by meditating on the Passion of our Lord, a meditation that comes to a head in the Sacred Triduum.

Have I made and lived out any real commitment to deepening relation with the Lord this Lent? Conversion, repentance, sorrow for sin are interior dispositions but exterior actions help bring it about: weekday Mass (where these readings were heard), Stations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass, a commitment to a sincere, thorough, honest, heartfelt Confession? The greatest words are ours for the taking, but I do have to take them.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn