

“Filling an Empty Hole”

St. Mary's, St. Ann
Ash Wednesday 2017
Fr. Jim Plough

If you knew this were your last Lent, what would you do? That's a far-fetched question for most of you, but at my age it comes closer to home. I find myself becoming more deliberate about what I do, more careful not to fritter away my time. Old age doesn't make me morbid. On the contrary, these are the happiest days of my life. I look back with a sense of fulfillment. I don't have to strive for higher goals. It's just that I know my days are more limited; the window of opportunity is narrowing and I need to be attentive to what I have left.

Lent is not about giving up something as an end in itself – giving up chocolate, doing without desserts. Lent is about growing, about creating something new, about a new life. Lent means springtime. To give up something without putting something else in its place is like digging a deep hole in the ground and then leaving it empty. Didn't you intend to plant a tree in that hole? Digging a hole is not an end in itself. It is just the first half. Don't make Lent incomplete. It may be the only Lent left to you. Resolved, I'm going to grow in my love for Scripture. Then you'll have to give up some time to do that. Resolved, I'm going to bring a little joy into someone's life. Then you'll have to give up some time devoted to yourself.

Last Sunday's THE DAILY SENTINEL, had a feature article entitled “Giving Up: Christians Consider the Meaning of Lent.” It described the Lenten practice of giving up, doing without, the tradition that makes some folks glum. The article presented the views of some religious leaders in the valley describing what they intended to do during Lent. Deacon Doug Van Houten, of St. Joseph's parish, said “ In years gone by, you had to give up candy or something you really liked. Now it seems there's less emphasis on giving up and more emphasis on giving, giving more of ourselves to others, to God. Anybody can do something like fasting from meat on Fridays. We used to do that every Friday. Now we regard Lent as a period of preparation and try to help ourselves focus more on Christ and on living in a way that honors that Christian tradition.

You may ask, “What do you intend to do this Lent?” In my goal of using my time with more deliberation, I have resolved to change my usual evening pattern several times a week. Usually, I am tired by the time evening comes, and when I've had a full supper, more often than not, I fall asleep in my lounge chair, missing whatever was on TV and wasting the evening nodding away. I intend to depart from that repetitious nonsense by deliberately choosing some reading or watching an educational DVD to spend that time more fruitfully. If I am successful, I'll report back to you. We all need to give up something for Lent. We need to replace that deprivation with something bearing fruit. Don't leave the deep hole you've dug empty. Fill it with a new life, replacing what you need to change.