

## LENT I 2008

### SERMON • CHRIST CHURCH PARISH

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#### 2 CORINTHIANS 6.1 • MATTHEW 4.1



**DO NOT WASTE WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU...THIS IS THE TIME TO RECEIVE GOD'S FAVOR...** ST PAUL SUMMARIZES THE OPPORTUNITY OF LENT IN TODAY'S EPISTLE...

In his Ash Wednesday sermon Father Hobbs noted because the mood of the Church has changed from joyous celebration to a more sobering tone does not mean we must become morose. Instead, Lent can be a time of vigorous spiritual growth, but we first need to look at ourselves....then we can undertake change in our lives. Being blessed with an overabundance of pride, so seeing ourselves as we really are can be difficult.

One the same day Father Looney cited the great paradox of Lent...we can either give up something – like questionable behavior...or we can take on something – such as additional study leading to growth and improvement.

Everyday we observe rejection of these three superb perspectives...rejections run the gamut...*LENT IS SUCH A DREARY TIME* said one...*I HATE LENT* said another... *WE'RE GOING ON VACATION...SEE YOU ON EASTER.* And, my favorite, *LENT IS LIKE A PERPETUAL FUNERAL...I GO TO CHURCH FOR HAPPY THINGS...*

All miss the point...all lead to emptiness...none to fulfillment.

St Paul wrote a hot letter to the Corinthians because they took on these attitudes...they decided to modify the Church to make it 'more relevant'...doing things *THEIR WAY*...they originated CAFETERIA CHRISTIANITY! St Paul counseled in definitive terms that believers and unbelievers are an unworkable combination; right and wrong, light and darkness, Jesus and the Devil do not work together. Period.

Then St Paul hit them over the head with a velvet hammer of kind and encouraging words from Leviticus, Ezekiel and Isaiah...*I WILL ALWAYS BE WITH YOU...FOLLOW WHAT I HAVE TOLD YOU...YOU ARE MY CHILDREN...*

Did the Corinthians 'GET THE MESSAGE'...? Obviously some did...some probably did not.

The more compelling question... Do WE get the Message...?

Lent exists for the precise purpose of considering just that...it is not a time of dread and avoidance...it is THE time set aside to come to terms with things as they are...the time to make things better through productive examination and study...particularly of temptation resistance. It's NOT about a period of total deprivation, sadness or escape.

Lent is a time to seize opportunity... that's what St Matthew relates in today's Gospel...Jesus going to the wilderness to work out his (human) future.

The three 'offers' Jesus received are found in our own lives...they can be very subtle and appear when you least expect them. The devil has a clever tendency to strike just when you think things are going well or when you are really hungry for something

One of the best analogies about Lent is that it's like cleaning up your garden from the debris of winter and getting things back into an attractive state...that pretty well describes the opportunity of Lent! Failing to address Springtime garden cleaning can make for a less than attractive Summertime...

My wish for all of us is that when Easter arrives we will look back and be grateful for having put in extra effort to make Lent a very productive time...applying the opportunity God has given us.

How...? Follow this example...

When Nehemiah was governor of Jerusalem people were sad when they heard how many things they had to change...then they GOT THE MESSAGE...while they had heard the Law read before, this time was different...they heard what was said, put it into practice...there was great relief and celebration.

In the same way, we have experienced Lent before...this time it can make a huge difference...**THIS TIME RECEIVE GOD'S HOSPITALITY...**

