

March 1, 2017  
JL 2:12-18  
2 COR 5:20-6:2  
MT 6:1-6, 16-18

My friends, Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent, is a time to leave your burdens on this side of the river. In forty days, we will have crossed the great river of Lent. Don't carry needless burdens with you into Easter. Leave them here on this side of Easter.

Today Jesus focuses on Judaism's three major spiritual disciplines: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Equally these times are associated with times of repentance. His discipline of almsgiving at this time of history is more about aid to the needy, where God's gifts are to be shared with the poor. For prayer, it is both individual and communal. Fasting allows us to appreciate food and/or drink in a way that we can share in the suffering of those that deals with it daily.

Each of us comes to this Lent carrying his or her peculiar burden. A changed attitude toward that burden is what I mean when I say, "Leave it behind." Let me name a few I have carried through many past Lents; see if you recognize them. Judging others, feeling sorry for myself, bitterness, grudges that I have carried for years, anxiety, and preoccupation with desires for material things. Need I go on? We go through life carrying needless burdens. This is the reason to make the choice today that enables us to be the fully alive humans we are intended by God to be.

Questions for further reflection:

1. Do you think it is possible to leave your burdens on this side of the river of Lent?
2. Do you see how fasting, prayer, and almsgiving help you during Lent?

Reflection by Deacon Bob Marben, St. Teresa of Avila in Valparaiso