

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish
Newark, DE
The First Day of Lent: Ash Wednesday – March 1, 2017/Year A
Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 103; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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May my words reveal the greater glory of God. AMEN

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“I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent ...”

Ash Wednesday always catches me up short, even when the Epiphany season is as long as this year. I have known when the First Day of Lent would arrive as I had prepared our worship and preaching schedule last Fall. I am certainly reminded of this day by the more-than-full feeling in my stomach from the pancakes and sausage of our Fat Tuesday celebration last evening. Yet, here we are on this First Day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, and once again, I feel caught up short.

It is not like I have not been prayerful in what my Lenten “leave behind and take up” actions and intentions need to be. What catches me short is when I impose the ash of the forehead of each person, and I receive the same, upon the mark of the Cross from my baptism, the same mark I made upon baby Freya Rey just this Sunday past. **“Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return,”** but when I impose the ash on a child’s forehead, it really gives me pause. I look into their young face, so hopeful, loving, and full of wonder. **Certainly they will have a long life ahead of them ... certainly this will be true, won’t it?**

For some, Lent is received as a **gift**. A time and intentionality as to what we will leave behind, what we will take on, and the hopeful difference in our lives and faith come Easter Day. For some, Lent is received with an **“ah jeez” reluctance. I have to** give something up, for a while ... **I have to** take something on, for a while ... and then begin deciding how long “a while” really looks like! Certainly St. Patrick granted a day’s rest from Lenten drudgery, right?

Then there are a growing number of people that Ash Wednesday, and the Season of Lent, **does not make a difference to their lives at all.** It is just another day, in another week, in another month, in another year. Nothing changes in my life, or around my life, it is just another day. This number is growing in our society and is reflected in our parish community.

The gifts for me of this Ash Wednesday, this Season of Lent, are found in both columns of **leave behind and take up** actions and intentions. For the **leave behind** column, part of this will be shared with my wife Marilyn by returning to healthier foods & eating habits from which we have strayed. Speaking for me, 20 pounds of the 30 pound kid I had shed has come back to nest! So a physical cleanse from sugar, LESS coffee in the day, fewer and healthier snacks, and intentional exercise 4-5 times weekly. Also in the **leave behind** column is connectivity to social media sources, Facebook in particular. While not the most frequent poster of information, selfies, or “look at me at another diocesan committee meeting” group shots, I have just found the

continued post-election dis-eased times to be just soul draining. I will tap our St. Thomas's page on occasion, but not much else. This leads to my **take up** column.

The primary invitation for this Lenten journey that struck my heart was heard in a portion of the collect this Last Sunday after Epiphany – **“Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory ...”** How I seek to live into this gift and invitation is daily walk with the foundation of the Clergy Corner articles these past months from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians ...

“... and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.”

To LIVE the gifts of the Spirit the best I am able each day. To daily take inventory on how I lived these gifts, or did not live them so well, and seek to be better the next day, and the next, and ... I am hearing this invitation as **the way, my way, to change ME** and by doing so, maybe changing the life and tenor of relations and dialogue with another, one person at a time.

You see, ALL we have is **forty days** – no more, no less. Yet these forty days, lived deeply in your **leave behind and take up** invitations can be a faith shaper for our life ahead. In the words of poet Mary Oliver ...

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

AMEN