

# Lent for Life

*1 John 1:9 But God is faithful and fair. If we admit that we have sinned, he will forgive us our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure.*

Our Catholic brothers and sisters have made the idea of confessing the wrongs we have committed a cornerstone in their faith. Other denominations also require or strongly suggest that their members confess their misconduct in word, deed, and thought to a member of their clergy or another member of their church, in order to be absolved, purged, cleansed, expunged, exonerated or forgiven of their errors.

Of course, there are also many Christian denominations which believe that the only ears that need to hear our confessions are Christ's. There is benefit to all involved, as the various Twelve Step Programs require, when we take personal responsibility for our harmful behavior and apologize and ask forgiveness of those we have harmed or in any way inconvenienced. There is spiritual healing through accepting ourselves as we are; this is taking the mature and higher moral path. Every time we do what is right, speak what is right, or think right thoughts, Spirit flows through us.

To avoid sinning, or what we know to be missing the mark with our thoughts, words, and actions, we must be aware of what we are doing in this moment. Sometimes it seems our spiritual natures and our human natures are battling each other.

I'm sure we've all heard the Native American fable:

One evening, an elderly chieftain told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, 'My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all.

One is evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other wolf is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.'

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked, 'Grandpa, which wolf wins?'

The old Cherokee simply replied, 'The one that you feed.'

The nature within us that we feed, or nourish with our attention and mental energy, is the nature that we express and allow to control us.

There are techniques for re-routing our thoughts before they turn into errant actions and words. The Bible tells us in Philippians 4:8: *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if*

*there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things.”*

Choosing different thoughts and changing our focus is equivalent to ‘rattling the cages’ of two dogs that don’t want to be friendly toward each other. Sometimes we have to divert attention and change the way an argument is progressing within us.

God does this for us at times. We may be having a struggle over an inner issue and Spirit sends us thoughts, or people come into our lives and share new ideas with us. If we reject those attempts, it seems like Spirit escalates its efforts to re-route our thinking until we require that Cosmic 2x4.

Sometimes illness or near death experiences or close calls are enough for us to change the way we have been behaving and thinking and we start to see things in a new light and from a new perspective.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 gives us this insight: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

It is not the lower human powers that help us tame our thoughts or temper the world’s influence over us; it is the power of God and our spiritual nature as directed by Christ that help us overcome our destructive and dark tendencies.

I believe the single most powerful means we have of tapping into those mighty spiritual weapons that destroy the strongholds of darkness is by becoming still and opening to the message of God through prayer, contemplation, and meditation. In the stillness of God we are given the awareness of what is blocking us from expressing the fullness of Christ. Through God's still small voice within we can come to understand what qualities we need to lovingly release so that we can know God more completely. "Be still and know that I am God," we are instructed.

Currently, we are within the 40 days of Lent, which lead us to Palm Sunday and culminate in Easter Sunday. It is customary during Lent to 'give up' some things ... bread, meat, or other things as symbols of our dedication to the path of Christ.

Of course once Lent is over, we often feel like we have paid our dues and go back to imbibing in whatever impurities we thought we needed to release during these 40 days.

Certainly this is of value, as it helps us to focus our minds and hearts on today. But what we discover, especially as we grow older, or should I say – as we mature – we discover that the attitude of Lent can be something that becomes a part of our ongoing daily routine; it becomes Lent for Life – especially if what we are giving up is part of the Evil Wolf mindset.

Joy Lang sent me an article on “40 Things to Give Up for Lent” that I will share with everyone. I have chosen my top four from the list, and I encourage you to choose your top four this week.

### 1. Comfort Zone.

Suppose we were to give up our comfort zone? Suppose we would no longer recoil in fear from new things and make excuses simply because we didn't think we could do it. Suppose we stopped allowing our lack of history in an area, or lack of experience or expertise, or a self-limiting thought that we are no good at something – suppose we no longer allowed those thoughts to control us? How much good could we do, share, and express if we had no comfort zone? When we can get rid of our Comfort Zone, we also release our fear of failure, and feelings of unworthiness.

### 2. Retirement –

This one is a good one for me, as it is for all of us. Many of us in this congregation are retired; some of us are nearing retirement and even looking forward to it. Still others are planning for retirement but our thoughts are not there; we are in the middle of careers and jobs and retirement is a far distant dream. Still others are at the beginnings of our careers or somewhere along the journey, but retirement is simply a word people use for something that doesn't apply to us.

Wherever we are along life's path, as long as we are still in a body we have a purpose that God wants us to pursue. Whether or not we have a paycheck coming in or not, is totally unrelated to serving God or influencing others through expressing the love, joy, and

peace of Christ. As long as we are willing God will use us for His purposes, whether we have a job or not. Retirement, in terms of ‘not doing anything anymore’, is a descending spiral into spiritual sleep.

### 3. Comparison.

Let’s give up comparing ourselves to others: our looks, our abilities, our intelligence, our wealth, our social status, our diets, our religious beliefs, our bone structure, skin color, hair styles, choices of friends, leisure activities ... Let’s stop comparing. Theodore Roosevelt said: Comparison is the thief of joy. An unknown author said: “Why compare yourself with others? No one in the entire world can do a better job of being you than you.”

Comparisons to others give us a false sense of where we are. We might feel better when comparing ourselves, which could lead to an erroneous feeling of superiority or security. We may feel worse after comparing to another, thus causing us to believe that we are inferior or unworthy. We may decide that after comparing that we are ok where we are, which could direct toward being stagnant or apathetic.

The truth is that nothing we have – whether that means possessions, assets, gender or gender preference, DNA, intelligence, status, race, vocabulary, abilities or talents -- can make us better or worse, more valuable or less valuable than anyone else in God’s eyes. Who are we trying to please: God or man? And anyone or any organization that claims otherwise is not

yet attuned to Spirit, but is ensnared in the ego and the dark mire of the human nature.

#### 4. Ungratefulness

Gratitude requires an awareness that goes beyond the past and future; thankfulness is solidly planted in the here and now. I just spoke about comparing and its dangers. To be thankful we must release the comparisons to what we have been given or attained in the past. If we measure what we have to what we have had before we could easily move into ingratitude. But if we can look at our lives right now, outside the context of what has been or what could be, then we can see in how many ways we are blessed.

When we express gratitude Spirit flows through us unimpeded. Through our thankfulness we express the joy, peace, and love of Christ. We love being around grateful people; it's not that they are constantly thanking God with their words, but that their entire face, attitude, and life reflects their joy and thanks.

But don't we have difficulties being around people who complain? Complaint is just a symptom of ingratitude. There is no joy or love flowing from ungrateful hearts; it is blocked.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, one of my favorite verses says, "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Like all the qualities of the Evil Wolf in our earlier story, ingratitude is repulsive; all of the lower earthly qualities are

difficult to observe, be around, to be a part of, and have it directed towards us. It takes our greatest spiritual efforts to not respond with darkness when darkness is what we face. Yet it is in the face of darkness that God's Love illuminates the brightest.

Through Lent, and the releasing of darkness, and through our continued efforts to find God's will in prayer, we can grow in Spirit and become more aware of the Christ and the workings of Spirit through us. If we can extend the ideas of release past 40 days and adopt a Lent for Life attitude, not only can we change our selves spiritually, but we can influence others from the growing love of the Christ radiating through us as we supplant our Evil Wolf thoughts with the Good Wolf thoughts. Our example – each of us individually – is God's greatest means of affecting the change the world needs today.

My prayer is that we align with Christ to dislodge the negative qualities that cling to our lives and cast shadows where our light would otherwise shine. I pray that we embrace the gentle stillness of prayer so that we can be open to God's fullest awareness and the good that God continually sends to us.

Let us pray....