

## February 21, 2016 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent

### *“We have our citizenship in heaven.”*

Although we rarely pay attention to it, a great paradox haunts our practices of Lent. We go through these six weeks every year fairly easily; yet if we stopped to reflect seriously on what's going on, it would be a shock. Just look at the imagery and themes of the period. Lent starts with ashes and a warning: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” It prods to repentance: There is something wrong with us and the world. I am not O.K.; neither are you. We are insufficient. This life is not enough. Each of the six weeks brings a profound admission of our inadequacy.

This is not easy stuff for a world given to excuses and plea-bargaining. The most we admit to is making a mistake or perhaps behavioral problems. But to admit that we are in profound trouble? Why? We all know there is nothing so terribly wrong with us.

Lent ends with an equally unpalatable celebration of cataclysmic failure: betrayal, brutality, cowardice, and degradation. True, it is reversed in a triumph of joy and glory, but in a way that defies all the laws of common sense. The dead, crucified one rises, his wounds glorious.

What is Lent trying to rub our faces in with all the talk of mercy, forgiveness, reform, and repentance? Surely we are not in such desperate need as the drama of Lent seems to suggest. Surely we do not need someone to die for our sins. Why do we need salvation?

Lent reminds us that we settle for too little, expect too little of ourselves and of God. Even the earthly promises which God made to Abraham challenged his narrow and routine attitude. When it comes to accepting the cross and the resurrection, the confines of comfort are even more stretched. We almost have to make the cross something routine and uninteresting. It is an assault upon the delusion that things are going pretty well and that we can settle down to business as usual.

What does it mean to be an enemy of the cross? Paul says it has something to do with having our bellies as our gods. More directly it means being locked into the things of this world. “As you well know, we have our citizenship in heaven; it is from there that we eagerly await the coming of our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will give a new form to this lowly body of ours...”



There is another world, a higher realm, a kingdom not of this earth. There is someone other than ourselves whom we must listen to and obey, since he is the Word of God, the new lawgiver, and prophet, even more than Moses and Elijah. There is more than our frail bodies and the dust from which they came. Other bodies await us, more grand and glorious than the ones we have now. We are not the final word. Nor is our death.

Lent requires a tremendous psychological disengagement from our earthly prejudice. It is madness to anyone whose ultimate goal is to satisfy physical appetite. But the meaning of Lent rests upon such a transfiguration of our minds and hearts. Its gestures and words require that we believe there is something, someone, for us beyond the stars and the everlasting hills.

Perhaps it was for these reasons that Paul wrote to Philippi and to all the denizens of earth, those he could so “love and long for, my joy and crown. Continue, my dear ones, to stand firm.” Not on the earth, but in the Lord.

[John Kavanaugh, SJ – shortened from: [http://liturgy.slu.edu/2LentCo22116/theword\\_embodied.html](http://liturgy.slu.edu/2LentCo22116/theword_embodied.html)]