Lent: Spiritual Spring Cleaning

I don’t know about you, but spring cleaning is not one of my favorite things. For me, one of the few advantages of long Niagara winters is that spring comes so late, my spring cleaning often dovetails into summer. But, whatever season, it still must be done!

It’s that way with Lent. Ash Wednesday, a day with rich scriptural readings and the wonderful symbolism of ashes, signals a season of discomfort. Lent certainly doesn’t have the cache of Christmas, or the elegance of the Easter season. It can often seem like one of those “go through to get through” events of life. But the prophet Joel reminds us to “Rend your hearts, not your garments”, so we know Lent is not only what we ‘give up’ but also about what we embrace as disciples of Jesus.

The traditional Lenten formula of faith: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving - all are time-tested and proven spiritual supports to help navigate the journey inward. And in making this inward Lenten journey, it is not a ‘search and destroy’ mission to be our own inner exorcist, but a gentle invitation to allow Jesus, the Lord of Life to enter our hearts and minds and transform them with the power of his love and forgiveness.

Here at Niagara, the “pray, fast, and give” mindset might seem hard to translate into something pliable for campus life. We’re always on the go, be it classes, internships, activities, or work that take up time and require infinite amounts of energy. So prayer and fasting seem to be a goner. And as for ‘giving’ - who’s got any money these days? Thus, the traditional Lenten observance might seem an anachronism to the average Niagaran. That’s the beauty of our faith - Jesus always finds a way to bring us more deeply into the mystery of his life and love. Prayer- the first pillar of Lent- can be done any time, any place, for as long as we like. The walk to class, a beginning or day’s end, the short car trip; all are moments of ‘accidental solitude’ and can be intentional times of turning to God. You’d be surprised how adaptable the Almighty can be when we afford Jesus an opening into our hearts and lives.

Two practical suggestions: take a copy of the Lenten book “Daily Reflections for Lent” we’re giving out Ash Wednesday. It provides daily scriptural readings and relevant reflections. Make time for God by joining us for a weekday Mass in chapel- a great place to think, pray, and reflect. And as it’s Lent, you won’t be alone.

As for fasting- try it, but with a different twist. Fast from gossip for a day. Fast from making snap judgments on a roommate or friend. Substitute a prayer for patience. Fast from the insatiable desire to check email or text as you walk across campus totally unaware of the world around you. Instead make eye contact, say hello, smile, and offer a short prayer of gratitude for your life, the day’s blessings, or for the people who made it possible for you to enjoy a Niagara education. Fast from ‘careless consumer spending’ for those things you know you really don’t need. And in your fasting, you’ll discover a deeper sense of self- because by emptying yourself, God is only too glad to fill that void.

Our Lenten theme in Campus Ministry this year is “Bread for the Journey”. Check out the bookmark you’ll be getting for our Lenten events. From the bread of life present in the Eucharist, to the manna of God’s Word feeding us, to the community of friendship that makes no NU student a stranger, may this Lent be a time of renewal of your faith in Jesus, and lead you to a deeper respect for all members of the University Community.
Give Up Giving Up!

This Lent I will be giving up the same thing I’ve been giving up for the past few years: I give up giving up. I started this tradition when I was in College. Like so many people, I struggled with self-esteem, perfectionism, and body-image issues growing up (and, for the record, I’m not done growing up)—common, especially among girls and young women, but too often overlooked and ignored in our male counterparts. (So, listen up, guys!! I’m validating your feelings, too!) I remember several instances of my Dad telling me not to put myself down; even if I was just “joking,” he insisted that “if you say those things enough, you eventually start to believe them, and they’re just not true.” Cue the bratty adolescent eye-roll, coupled with the all-too-annoyed, I have way better things to be doing right now, “okaaaaay, Dad.” As I began to grow out of myself and into a less self-absorbed, more self-and other-aware College student, it became clear to me that my Dad… was right (sshhh…). Not only had I started to believe some of the negative self-talk I’d been giving up for years, but I learned that these words had a serious effect on others, as well. People who loved me were hurt when I put myself down. If my earthly father is brought close to tears by my negative self-talk, imagine what my Heavenly Father, the One who loves me most, must feel!

In Genesis, it is written that “God created [human] in his image; in the divine image…” (1:27). God is in each of us. If this is true, then every human person I meet is deserving and worthy of my love, attention, and respect—the same love I give to God, and that God gives to me. This is a common attestation among Christians. We work to love as we are loved, following that Greatest Command. But how much work do we put into loving ourselves? If I truly believe that all human persons are made in God’s image, and I do, then I am called to love and respect God in myself just as I love and respect God in my brothers and sisters. Easier said than done! We are all guilty of negative self-talk—“I’m not [good, fast, skinny, wild, pretty, strong, funny, smart] enough.” We are all guilty of giving up on ourselves every now and then. While it definitely has become easier over the years, I’m human (and a girl), and I still need reminders. I pray and wait in hopeful anticipation for the day when I will have to come up with some other creative Lenten sacrifice, when I look at myself and see, every time, the beautiful daughter my Father, my family, and my friends see and know. Until then, I give up, again, giving up on myself. I give up thinking and saying negative things about myself. Instead, I will embrace God’s love for me, and I will love God in my love and respect for myself. When I slip, and I will—I always do (Campus Ministers are people, too) —I’ll turn to the Word of God and remind myself of Genesis 1:27, John 3:16, Jeremiah 31:3, Matthew 22:39 (look them up; it’ll be good for you!) and the examples of God’s love in my life, in my co-workers, my students, my friends, and my family. I will turn those negative thoughts into prayer and positive conversation with Christ.

I challenge you to do the same. Open your heart to the love God has for you and the love God wants you to have for yourself. Give up giving up!

Share your Lenten journey & grow closer to God in community at any of the following events:

**Encounter with Christ: You & Me:** a winter, Lenten retreat at the Abbey of the Genesee Feb. 26-28. This student-organized and led retreat will offer time for prayer and discussion, fun and relaxation. Please join us! The entire weekend costs only $10! Space is limited, so sign up today in Campus Ministry (LLGC). Contact Kristina for more info: kschliesman@niagara.edu, 286-8414.

**LIFT small faith groups:** These student groups meet weekly to pray, read Scripture, and discuss what it is to be a person of faith on campus. Join any group as they express the joys and struggles of Living In Faith Together, Mondays and Wednesdays at 8pm in the Chapel or Thursdays at 8PM in the Rare Book Room.

**Birthday Blessing & Social:** Sunday February 28, 10PM Mass, Alumni Chapel

**Study Break:** Take a break from mid-terms; enjoy food, games, and conversation, Wednesday March 10, 7-9PM, Under the Taps (LLGC)

**Theology Under the Taps:** What’s Love Got to Do With It? Monday, March 15, 7:00pm, Under the Taps
Lent is traditionally known as a time for fasting and “giving up” things and food. The question then is what fills its place? Often people ask me, “If I gave up chocolate and Face Book for Lent, may I indulge on Sundays since Sundays don’t count in Lent?” I usually sigh and say, “Well living for indulgence on Sunday does that make us a better person? Is that sacrifice?” I usually receive a sigh back. When I was eleven, my teacher told us to offer our sacrifices and penances for the pain and suffering Jesus experienced suffering and dying on the cross for US. She was quite graphic in her description of the Crucified Christ. I being a visual child regretted that Religion was after lunch which made my mind drift in other places. Without fail, my teacher would read my facial expression and say, “Miss Saltarelli can you not keep your mind on Jesus’ path for just a few moments?” My mind would have a twinge of conscience for that I could not keep my thoughts selfless for Jesus. Seriously though as I aged, I asked, “What could I do to help me draw closer to what Jesus really is all about? I learned that getting me off myself and focused on others helped me focus on recognizing Christ. Here at NU, Super Bowl Sunday became “Souper and Pasta Bowl” Sunday. The Sunday Community, Lynch, Seton, and O’Shea Halls collected 500 + items for Our Lady of Lebanon Food Pantry. I was so proud to deliver the non-perishables which filled some empty shelves but most importantly would eventually fill some empty stomachs of people that live so close to us. Those that donated were leaven for not only the hungry Christ but for the pantry worker who agonized over how she was going to feed the hungry desperate Christ. The students that went on BASIC to Panama could not help but recognize that the Panamanians despite their material poverty were rich with joy. The Panamanians gave not from their excess but from their own need. They recognized us as Christ and we most certainly saw Christ in them. This Lent why not make time for others…It can be working at the Food Pantry on a Tuesday or Thursday. It certainly may be participating in Campus Ministry’s “Day of Service” on Saturday, March 6th or perhaps assisting with the Baby Shower for Summit Outreach. Perhaps, you may look at the poverty of Haiti a step further by signing a petition to cancel Haiti’s large debt. If you have an idea, I will certainly help you carry it out. If you need some ideas for a project, I welcome the opportunity to help you with that. Just think about joining me in figuring out how to be “bread” for the least among us.

“This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; Your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard”.

Is 58: 6-8 (New American Bible)

⇒ Join SVDP Society - Meeting February 24, 2010 - 7:30pm - Under the Taps
⇒ SVDP Service Day - Saturday, March 6th 9am to 1pm - more information to follow
⇒ Invisible Children - meet every Monday @ 7pm - LLGallagher Center - back tables
⇒ NU Students for Life - meet @ 3pm - Mondays - Campus Ministry Office
⇒ Weekly Rosary - Wednesdays - 9pm - Alumni Chapel
LENT... Bread for our Journey
Niagara Lenten Journey 2010

Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2010
Masses 12:15pm & 7:15pm
Prayer Services 8:30am & 5:05pm
Lenten Booklets will be distributed

Weekday Masses
Mon/Wed/Fri @ 12:15pm
Tue/Thurs @ 12:35pm
Sunday Masses
11am & 10pm

Stations of the Cross
Wednesday, March 3rd - 8pm
Wednesday, March 24th - 8pm
Alumni Chapel

Confessions
Wednesdays @ 5 - 5:30pm
Starting 02/24/10
Alumni Chapel

SVDP Service Day
Saturday, March 6th
9am - 1pm

Lenten Penance Service
Monday, March 22nd - 7:30pm
Alumni Chapel

Sponsored by the Office of Campus Ministry