“LENT: Renewing Our Baptismal Calling”

Several years ago, when I was the Vocation Director for the Vincentian Community, I attended a conference sponsored by the National Religious Vocation Directors in which Ronald Rolheiser, OMI was the keynote speaker. Fr. Rolheiser spoke eloquently on the importance of recapturing the notion of religious imagination in an increasingly secular world, particularly in the Western Hemisphere. He challenged us to envision our missionary work as inviting the secular world to fall in love with God again. He holds that we should not treat those in the secular world as the enemies of Christ but as the “adolescent children” of our Judeo-Christian heritage who desire love and care. His point, I believe, is that we all need to mature in our relationship with God and neighbor, and this demands openness to being energized and critiqued by God and community (Church).

Rolheiser also challenged religious life to move from the baptism of John by water to the baptism of Jesus by fire. He noted that for over forty years religious women and men have been prophetic in deconstructing and condemning that which is sinful in the Church and society, and these efforts have produced much good, yet it is not enough. This prophetic baptism is gained by will power, but Jesus’ baptism of fire offers grace which is transforming because it takes away the sin. This important point calls us to focus on imagining a community that really NEEDS Jesus Christ in the world because with our God all things are possible and made new.

Finally, the call went out for each of us to be a saint in the world. Indeed, to not only do good works and to be ethical, but to be great in following Jesus Christ. Religious communities need to move beyond being stalled in what was or is now, to imagining a vital way of speaking, listening and being in the world that desires not only the bread we offer but also our hearts.

Father Rolheiser’s lecture certainly pertains to an audience that extends beyond vocation directors and religious communities/orders to all the baptized who are sent to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ into the world. We are all called to be transformed by Christ’s baptism of fire so as to be on fire or to be saints in and for the world. This Lenten season is an opportunity for all members of the Church to be renewed in Jesus Christ through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

So let us fast from our selfishness and feast on Christ who offers us new life and everlasting life and sends us out to bring this total gift of peace and joy into a broken world.

God Bless,
Fr. Kevin Creagh, CM
“From Saigon to Mount Eagle Ridge”

Since the beginning of this semester, I have been ministering in the Office of Campus Ministry as an intern. I will be learning the “art” of ministry in Catholic higher education and feel very privileged to do so at Niagara University. I would like to take this opportunity to formally introduce myself to the campus community and to offer some “first impressions” of the NU community.

I was born and raised in a loving and caring family consisting of my parents and two brothers in Daklak, in the South of Vietnam. As a child I very much enjoyed playing sports and other games, especially pool and ping pong. Later, I went to college and studied the Chinese culture and language. During this time I entered the Vincentian seminary to prepare for the priesthood and was ordained in 2008. Soon after, I left Vietnam for the United States years to pursue further theological studies at St. John’s University, Queens NY.

Upon completion of my studies in December 2011, I earned an M.A. and was then asked by Fr. Michael Carroll, the Provincial of the Eastern Province of the Congregation of the Mission, to come to Niagara University as an intern for the next two years before returning home to Vietnam. I immediately said “yes” to this opportunity and I am so grateful to Fr. Levesque for making this internship a possibility for me.

My first experience of meeting NU students was during B.A.S.I.C in Philadelphia. I was so glad to work side-by-side with them in the various places in which we served those who are marginalized, oppressed, homeless, and vulnerable. The students inspired me with their compassion, enthusiasm, and creativity.

Another major experience of coming know NU students was during our Winter Retreat. I, along with other Campus Ministers, accompanied 10 students at Stella Niagara’s Center of Renewal. Throughout the retreat, these students inspired me by their deep spirituality and care for another. I was reminded of St. Vincent’s statement, “Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of everything.” NU students are certainly very capable!

Finally, the NU students and members of this campus community have been so warm and welcoming of me. I am profoundly impressed by the goodness I have already come to experience here. From the bottom of my heart, I am very happy and blessed to be a part of this community.

May the Holy Spirit fill your heart with abundant graces during this sacred season of Lent. You are in my prayers.

Fr. John Dang, C.M.
Sacramental Care
“Don’t Stop Now” - Why I’ll Never Stop Praying

Lent is a time to connect with God, to establish, or re-establish, our relationship with our Lord. In any relationship, communication is the key to growing closer. Imagine what your relationships with your closest friends would look like if you didn’t talk frequently, regularly, or at all. God calls us into friendship; God wants to hear us and wants to be heard. To establish, maintain, and grow in friendship with God, we must speak and listen.

I believe in the importance of prayer, and I find great comfort in the knowledge that my prayers are always heard- no matter when or where or what they may be, God is ever-present and attentive to my needs and desires.

My parents taught me how to pray at a very young age. I was encouraged to pray not only at Mass and around the dinner table, but anywhere, at any time, and for any reason. There were two criteria for my bedtime prayers: 1) address Jesus and thank Him; and 2) ask Jesus for whatever you want.

It’s a simple formula, yes, but not always easy to implement. Even for someone like me, who “does church for a living!” One particularly trying time came about a year and a half ago.

I spent the summer of 2010 in the hospital, beside my dad who lay almost completely incapacitated for three months recovering from a traumatic brain injury and subsequent surgeries and complications. Over the course of those months, I would go to pray, attempting to follow that familiar childhood formula, and find I had nothing to thank Jesus for. Don’t get me wrong, I was thankful for my dad’s survival, of course, but I reasoned that this God who kept my dad alive is also the God who could have (and should have) stopped any of this from happening in the first place. I was angry and quite anxious.

It took my dad a long and scary ten days to wake up after his surgery. When he woke up, I told him everything that happened. I also told him about all the people who were praying for him, and he looked at me and said “don’t stop now.”

What I didn’t realize then, but have since come to understand, was that at that very moment, I was holding the hands, looking into the eyes, and hearing the voice of Jesus Himself. God was speaking to me, and the message was loud and clear: “don’t stop praying; your prayers matter to me.”

I didn’t stop praying that summer. In all my frustration, sadness, fear, and anger, I prayed— not because my dad told me to, but because Jesus told me to. My Heavenly Father, through my own earthly father, told me He wanted to hear everything I had to say.

There is never a “bad time” to meet with Jesus. Nor is there ever a “right” or “wrong” thing to say to Him. He wants to hear everything we have to say. Similarly, He wants to be heard. In order to hear God’s voice, we must quiet ourselves and be open and attentive to signs of God’s action and guidance in our lives.

I share this story with you because I have found great peace and comfort in prayer, and I wish that same peace for each of you and all of my students. What you have to say is important to God, and God wants you to hear the answer. Take time to go, or go back, to Jesus this Lent—in your joy, confusion, anxiety, thankfulness, and anger. He can take it all, and He wants to. It’s simple: address and thank Him, and ask Him for whatever you want. Don’t stop now.
“Another Thought on Fasting...”

True Fasting

“...Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

The LORD will guide you always”

(Isaiah 58: 6-11)

Lent gets us thinking about life as bigger than ourselves. Traditionally, we give up things, particularly some sort of food. In the past, I used Lent as a diet plan, which usually failed. Lent is meant to be more of a time of transformation. Perhaps consider fasting a bit from FACEBOOK, Twitter, or whatever absorbs your time and use that time to help those in need. The questions, I would suggest to ask are: “What will help me be a better person after Lent? How can I bring Easter to others?”

While giving up certain food may not be a bad thing it is important to ask yourself what is the next step with this gesture? I invite you to make a difference. Get involved in the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Make a difference in a young life. Take up a worthy cause. Draw awareness to an issue of injustice. Contact me, and I can help you. I would love to buy you a cup of coffee and discuss all the possibilities!

Have a good Lent and take advantage of all the possibilities that Campus Ministry has to offer.

Monica Saltarelli
Campus Minister
"Curb Your Appetite" - The Lenten Observance of Fasting

Sadly, many persons look upon Lent as a 40-day diet plan in which they give up some drink or food that they crave. You may hear yourself saying something like this on Ash Wednesday: “This Lent I will give up pop, snacks, alcohol, or chocolate, and assuredly this will be pleasing to God. Perhaps I will shed a couple of pounds and please God at the same time! Not so bad, uh! Surely God will be pleased to see me becoming more health conscious.” At first glance, this all seems so reasonable. Of course, once Lent is over, we go on a binge, eating or drinking to our hearts’ content. My questions are these: “Is this truly the sacrifice that God desires from you and me? Am I demonstrating my own will power and perhaps self-discipline so as to impress others? How will this kind of fast make a difference in my relationship to God? Do I sense a diminished enslavement to my various appetites as a result of fasting, and so better able to follow God’s will in my life? Or am I really no better off than before Lent began? Can I consider others needs, including their basic need for food and water, or am I more preoccupied with self and fulfilling my own needs?”

These are difficult questions because they press us to examine the true motivations behind our Lenten practices, including fasting. It is not simply that I have given up something that I really like which is fulfilling the spirit of the Lenten period of penance and self-denial. We get a sense of this in the Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday:

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting.
Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.
But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden.
And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.” (Matthew 6:1-6)

Fasting, then, has a way of revealing what controls us. For example, if I crave something like cream-filled doughnuts (Of course, it is the day after Mardi Gras!), I am going to become pre-occupied with this inner hunger for these doughnuts, and cave in to my cravings when I pass Tim Horton’s. It is not merely the immediate food items that I have chosen to give up for Lent, though, which matters, although this is a good start. There are other appetites as well.

In Psalm 69 David cries to God for help from his various enemies. David’s fasting revealed much more that controlled him and I expect most of us, too. From the depths of his soul he realized the control that anger, bitterness, strife and fear had upon him. His fasting was meant to liberate him from these deeply seated inner emotions. We can add lust, envy, greed, etc. Very often we are inclined to act upon these temptations/cravings. One analogy compares this condition to a river that has overflowed its banks. The only means of controlling this river is by making sure that it remains within its proper channel. Thus fasting can have the same benefit of keeping our cravings or hungers in check. There is a proper balance.

Jesus’ own struggle with temptations after having been in the desert for forty days, including a stringent fast, reveals the fruit of his own self-denial. When the devil tempted him to turn these stones into bread, Jesus responded by saying:

“‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”
(Matthew 4:6)

While undoubtedly Jesus was ravenous after not eating for such a long time, he chose what he believed was of far greater value to him (parenthetically us, too!). He possessed an inner freedom to choose a greater good. Our own fasting has this same purpose. It should be noted that there is a choice for a greater good. Chocolate or whatever we might choose to sacrifice for Lent is not necessarily bad in and of itself. In essence, then, Lent provides us an opportunity (some might call it a discipline) whereby we can choose the greater good both for ourselves as well as others.

I urge you, then, to ask for God’s guidance when deciding which discipline to follow in observance of Lent. I have focused on fasting, but there are also prayer and alms giving. All are appropriate and helpful to preparing well for Easter. Regardless of which practice(s) you adopt, I hope that you gain greater freedom to live your life in accordance with God’s will and purpose for you.

May God bless you this Lent and always!

Fr. Bruce Krause, C.M.
University Chaplain
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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ash Wednesday</strong></td>
<td>February 22</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8:30am &amp; 5:05pm Prayer Service</td>
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<td>12:15pm &amp; 10:00pm Mass</td>
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<td><strong>Service Day</strong></td>
<td>February 25</td>
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<td>Meet in the Campus Ministry Office at 5:00pm</td>
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<td><strong>Brown Bag Lunch Series</strong></td>
<td>Thursdays at 12:00pm LLG 110</td>
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<td><strong>Student Bible Study</strong></td>
<td>Thursdays at 7:30pm Campus Ministry Office</td>
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<td><strong>Healing Mass</strong></td>
<td>March 11, 11:00am</td>
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<td><strong>Lenten Mission</strong></td>
<td>Fr. Sy Peterka, C.M.</td>
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<td>March 18, 11:00am &amp; 10:00pm</td>
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<td>March 19, 7:00pm Alumni Chapel</td>
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<td><strong>Seder Supper</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Taizé Service</strong></td>
<td>March 27, 7:00pm Alumni Chapel</td>
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<td><strong>Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)</strong></td>
<td>Before Mass Sundays: 10:30am &amp; 9:30pm</td>
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<td>Wednesdays: 4:30-5:30pm</td>
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<td>Before Mass Fridays: 11:45am</td>
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<td><strong>Penance Service</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Easter Sunday Mass</strong></td>
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**Sunday Mass Alumni Chapel**
11:00am & 10:00pm

**Daily Mass Alumni Chapel**
Monday to Friday @ 12:15pm

**Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)**
Wednesdays 4:30-5:30pm - Alumni Chapel

Join us for Mass - Everyone is always WELCOME!!