

Ash Wednesday

ONE WHO INVITES

He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day.

—John 1:39

What a difference there is between being obligated to attend a gathering and being free to decline. There is also a difference between a gathering that takes place at a public domain and one within a home environment in which getting acquainted develops more easily. The disciples expressed curiosity about Jesus. He suggested they meet where he was staying so they could get to know him. Where did this revealing conversation take place, and what did they see? Scripture does not give us the particulars of what these seekers experienced. But something truly significant occurred during the time they spent with Jesus. When they left that dwelling place, the hearts of these inquisitive visitors glowed.

They desired to commit their future to this man whose spiritual magnetism drew them to him.

A similar, heartfelt response to “come and see” awaits us during this Lent. By spending time with the qualities of Jesus, we are able to be more intimately acquainted with his personal traits of goodness. We do so by going to where his Spirit stays—in the home of our hearts and in the larger dwelling place of the world. As our hearts ignite with a renewed desire to give ourselves more totally to the abiding love of Jesus, we become credible invitations for others to come and see this divine Companion who enthralls us with his beloved presence.

Mentor of my life,
I stand at the threshold of the Lenten journey,
knowing I have the ability to learn from you.
I can accept or decline your open invitation
to abide attentively in your dwelling place.
I desire to set my heart on belonging to you.

Today: I accept the invitation to “come and see.”

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

ONE WHO IS DISCIPLINED

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

—Luke 9:23

There were undoubtedly moments when Jesus wanted to return to Nazareth and lead a quiet, unencumbered life in which no one pestered him for help. The days of crowds with hurting people steadily pressing upon him, the times his disciples failed to perceive his message, or the moments when skeptics openly taunted him about his beliefs—these were surely tough times for Jesus. Yet he persisted in being there for others. He welcomed those in distress. He continued to love his disciples. And he never gave up on teaching. His journey required a lot of prayer and disciplined willpower for Jesus to live a life of unconditional love.

And so, too, with our lives. Some of our situations include tough things we have to bear, even when we do not want to do so. It takes much discipline and courage to enter into what we are unable to shove out of the way. Our troubles and crosses are unique to each of us. They might come in the form of old hurts, persistent addictions, financial problems, relationship struggles, physical or mental illness, undesirable duties, or the constant grayness of grief and depression. Like Jesus, when certain aspects of life cannot be altered, we accept them as sources of spiritual transformation, trusting that qualities such as resilience, compassion, patience, and kindness will mature in us.

Bearer of the Cross,
no one wants to have burdens and afflictions,
yet they come into our lives and weigh us down.
I can learn from you how to shoulder my troubles
and find my greatest source of strength in you.
Help me to deny myself when it is required.

Today: I choose to accept the cross of my
difficulties.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

ONE WHO PRAYS

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

—Mark 1:35

In the midst of intense work, Jesus left the constant demands on his presence and went to be alone with his most cherished confidante. There he found necessary restoration. Did Jesus hesitate to care for his weariness, knowing there was still much to be done? If he was fully human, this tension probably existed for him, as it does for us when work or other happenings keep piling up with little relief in sight. The gospel writers seldom tell us what or how Jesus prayed. They only reveal that he deliberately placed himself apart to commune with his heart's first love. His vibrant ministry gives ample evidence of the re-inspired stimulus he gained during these solitary sojourns.

We learn from Jesus that we need to be faithful to our inner life if we are to remain motivated in giving the best of ourselves to others. I think of this when I want to get on with the day's pressing activities and omit morning meditation. It's not so much about *what* or *how* we pray as it is the fact that we purposefully pause to strengthen the bond of our connection with the Holy One. Let us put aside our electronic devices, TV programs, constant work, or whatever else lures us long enough to go apart and spend some quiet moments with the One who sustains our relationship.

Intimate Confidante,
you know how much I value your presence.
You also understand when I do not follow through
with my intention to strengthen our relationship.
Keep drawing me to your compassionate heart
until I readily give my time to refocus and renew.

Today: I step aside to pause and enter a quality
time of prayer.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

ONE WHO SEES GOOD IN OTHERS

He looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”

—Luke 19:5

What would you do if someone with a reputation for being no good showed up in your life? Would you want to spend time with him or her? That is exactly what Jesus did. His open-minded, inner vision peered beneath the layers of cheating and dishonesty in Zacchaeus and discerned something valuable within him. Not that Jesus denied the reality of the man’s immoral behavior. Instead, Jesus chose to focus on the goodness residing within Zacchaeus. He trusted the man’s potential to change.

Do we give people a second chance when they’ve hurt us? Do we pigeon-hole them into categories,

believing they'll never be different? Does a voice in our heads say such things as "That guy won't amount to anything" or "She's always been that irresponsible"? I look back to when I was young and see how people took a risk by inviting me to develop my talents when they were submerged under a veneer of criticism and mistrust. When I remember this, I deliberately concentrate on the latent virtues in others. While abuse and harmful behavior are never acceptable, we can allow people the opportunity to amend their ways. Everyone fails. Everyone contains a basic core of goodness. Let's look for that, as Jesus did, and invite those who offend us by their attitudes and behavior to have another chance.

Deep-Seeing One,
you know my wrongdoings and limitations
and are also well aware of my essential goodness.
You value in me what I do not always see.
Help me believe in my virtues and good qualities.
Remind me often to give others a chance to grow.

Today: I give thanks for those who trusted my
latent virtues.