

My Evolution of Lent

As I was enjoying my rice, aviyal, and payar thoran after a blessed Qurbana, I was startled when I unexpectedly heard an eight year old Sunday School student sitting across from me saying - “I hate lent, there’s no meat!!” I couldn’t help but laugh as it reminded me of myself when I was younger; if only she knew what lent was really about.

The meaning of lent has changed for me from childhood to adulthood. As a child, lent was a form of cruel and unusual punishment, absolute pure torture. Taking away a child’s dinosaur chicken nuggets and replacing that with carrots and celery can really do a toll on the emotional, mental, and physical state of a child, although I managed of course. After all, I was young then, I didn’t know much about orthodoxy or fasting or anything of that sort. All I knew was Jesus loved me, and will always take care of me. I lived a good chunk of my childhood with that mentality, then came the teenage years. Lent took on a whole new meaning during this period of my life. To me, it was just a set of rules that shouldn’t be broken. The idea was that, you’re not allowed to eat meat, and if you do, you break lent and God is mad at you. I became so focused on the “giving up” part of lent, that it became the ONLY part of lent. And what was worse was that I would see my Christian friends eating meat, and I would think to myself, I’m better than them; because I was able to stick it through and they couldn’t.

And now, I have realized my idea of lent had been completely wrong all this time. Now, Lent is about giving less emphasis on the “giving up”, and placing more emphasis on the “replacing with”. To me, Lent has become a period of self reflection, repentance, self renewal, preparation, and self discipline. Lent has become a period of silence and getting in tune with the scriptures. Lent has become about prayer, fasting, meditation, and acknowledging myself as a sinner. Lent has become about me building that relationship back with God which was once lost. Lent has become about pleading for mercy and grace which our Savior so graciously grants, although we are so undeserving of it. Lent has become about spreading the same love that created the world to everyone I encounter, and giving unto others what I don’t need. Lent has become all about forgiveness; forgiving my brothers and sisters who’ve done wrong and vice versa. Lent, my brothers and sisters, has become a prescription that the church put in place for a sick, infected, and dirty individual such as myself.

I pray that this teaching from Christ himself, affects you in a way where you change your views on how you offer up things to God, especially during this Lenten season. The following passage is taken from St Luke 18: 9-14. Read it, meditate on it, and take it to heart.

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

May grace always draw near, and have a blessed remainder of the Lenten season. See you at the empty tomb!