

A Lenten Reflection 2024

As we begin Lent this year we're faced with the devastating effects of the invasion of the Ukraine by Russia on the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. On all our television screens and social media feeds are images of brave Ukrainians holding their own against those invading their homes and communities? The devastation of war can be shown in bombed buildings and massive refugee movement but nothing makes it clearer or closer to our heart than seeing a little child choked with tears clutching Tigger and her mother's hand trying to understand what is happening to her and everyone else. The image alone brings tears to our eyes and, all at once, we understand the evil of war and the importance of peace.

The peace prayer of St. Francis certainly calls us to that deeper space within us where we yearn to be an instrument of peace for the world, to be there for those in need and to grow in our ability to lean into one another so that together we form a network of love for all those who are suffering. Our desire is to live into that prayer each day of our lives. Perhaps we need to begin Lent with these words seeping deep into our hearts, calling us to hope, bringing us back to a world of beauty and peace. Lent is a perfect time to look into our own hearts and see where we can find peace and where we are being called to create peace in our world.

So here we are in LENT, a time when we have the opportunity to take stock of ourselves, and to look toward hope and peace. Lent invites us to face the war-torn parts of ourselves and to make peace with our paranoia, our anger, our jealousies, and our distance from others, our addictions, and our unresolved hurts. It invites us to feel our smallness, to feel our vulnerability, to feel our fears, and to open ourselves up to the chaos of life. Lent is not for the weak at heart. It is a call not just to toughen up but to let in the light and rekindle the love that is our source of hope and the path to true peace in our world.

The word "lent" is derived from an old English word meaning springtime. It's a time of growth and of new life. In Latin, lente means slowly. So, lent points to the coming of spring and it invites us to slow down our lives so as to be able to take stock of ourselves and to rekindle love. Ed Hayes, in a book entitled *A Lenten Hobo Honeymoon* tells us Lent calls us to a renewal of our romance with God—a honeymoon of sorts. He tells us Jesus journeyed through life as a hobo, as one with 'nowhere to lay his head.'

Each year as we begin our Lenten journey, we are marked on our foreheads with ashes in the sign of the cross. Ron Rolheiser offers us a mythical image. "In every culture, there are ancient stories, myths, which teach that all of us, at times, have to sit in the ashes. We all know for example, the story of Cinderella. The name itself literally means the little girl (puella) who sits in the ashes (cinders). The moral of the story is clear: Before you can be beautiful, before you can marry a prince or princess, before you can go to the great feast you must first spend some lonely time in the ashes, humbled, smudged, tending to duty and the unglamorous, and "waiting". Lent is that season, a time to sit in the ashes. It is not incidental that we begin lent by marking our foreheads with ashes.

May each of us walk slowly into Lent with a deep desire to be an instrument of peace. May we show compassion to all the war-torn parts of ourselves and may that self-compassion enable us to look around at our war-torn world in a way that encircles it with love and offers forgiveness, hope and gratitude. May we spend some time in the ashes of our world looking at it with compassion and offering it a peace that the world does not know – a peace that God alone can give.