
Abide in Christ: Our Lenten Journey
Archbishop John C. Wester
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One of my favorite scripture passages comes at the end of Luke's Gospel. It is usually known as the Road to Emmaus. It recounts a simple journey of two discouraged disciples of Jesus who were returning home after their Master's tragic crucifixion. It was a long and sad journey until they were joined by a stranger who shared the Word with them and broke the bread. They came to discover, with an inexpressible joy, that their companion along the way was the risen Christ.

In just a short while, we will also begin a journey, a journey we call Lent. During these 40 days and nights, we are invited to come to know the risen Christ more deeply while on the way, sharing the word and breaking the bread. Specifically, as Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy reminds us, Lent is a time to prepare for the renewal of our baptismal promises (and for some of us to be baptized or received into the Church) and to do penance. But in order to get ready to renew our baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Sunday, we must have a change of heart, that is, we must turn from sin and selfishness and turn toward the Lord, even as we reach out to others with love and compassion. The Church often uses the Greek word *metanoia* to indicate this inner conversion from selfishness to selflessness, from an exclusive love of self to a life-giving love of God and neighbor.

There is a sense of urgency to this journey. A sense that we have become complacent about our faith and our relationship with Jesus Christ. We know that our baptismal promises have faded a bit and no longer hold a priority in our lives. It is time to return to the Lord with all our hearts. As Paul says to the Corinthians, "Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

Before undertaking any journey, it is important to bring along what we will need to make sure we can achieve our goal. There are traditionally three practices that help us to reach our Lenten goal of Easter: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Through prayer, we encounter Christ, present in the faces of every member of our human family, so often still walking that long road to Calvary. Through fasting, we are reminded of our hunger for God and of our need to be in solidarity with those for whom hunger is a daily reality. Through almsgiving, we symbolically "make ourselves poor" for the sake of the materially poor and remind ourselves that we are all poor in the eyes of God, dependent on God for our very existence.

One very good way to combine these three activities of our upcoming spiritual journey is the Catholic Relief Service Rice Bowl which I encourage all of us to use during the holy days of Lent. The CRS Rice Bowl asks us to first take a moment to pray for all those who are helped by this yearly practice. CRS reaches out to people in India, Zambia, El Salvador, Mexico, Ethiopia and about 95 other countries throughout the world reaching about 100 million people. As we pray for these brothers and sisters, we see the face of Christ reflected in them. We then are called to fast on their behalf, allowing our hunger to remind us of their hunger, thus helping us to see how we are all one, one human family with God as our Father. And then, the money we save from fasting we put into the CRS Rice Bowl, 75% of which will be sent to CRS for their extraordinary work with those in need throughout the world. The other 25% will be kept in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe to help the hungry, homeless and needy here at home.

So, as we begin this journey of Lent, I ask us all to pray, fast and give alms in support of the CRS Rice Bowl and to prepare us to renew our baptismal promises this coming Easter. If we journey well through this upcoming Lent, then just like those first disciples on the road to Emmaus, our eyes, ears and hearts will be opened and we will once again recognize the face of Jesus who accompanies us along the way.