



Reflection from Fr. Garry 3/1/2020

In the gospel for Ash Wednesday, Jesus advises us:

"When you give alms,
do not blow a trumpet before you,
as the hypocrites do in the synagogues
and in the streets to win the praise of
others."

This admonition may seem naive, insignificant, and wildly unrealistic as we begin yet another election year. We will be inundated with political ads and speeches, with each candidate touting how he/she is the one that can make great things happen. At the same time, they may be vilified by their opponents as the worst thing that could happen to this country.

Of course, it may seem like the last three years have been part of a long re-election campaign, with a president who tells us over and over again that his work {or he} is "the greatest," or "first time in history," or "never before seen," or "the best ever," or "something no one else could do," or "can never be repeated," etc., etc.

In a culture that rewards people for "blowing their own horn," and which often prizes appearance over substance and idolizes fame, how do we take the above words of Jesus seriously?

Our traditional Lenten practices are prayer, fasting, and alms giving. Sometimes these have been seen as mere rules to follow in order to be a good Catholic. But their deeper purpose is help draw our attention away from our habitual narcissistic and selfish concerns, which are based on fear. When we mindfully practice these things, it helps us realize that our well-being, even our very existence, does not depend totally on our attending to our own needs. When we do without as much food and money, and when we devote time to prayer instead of devoting time to collecting what we think we need, we grow in trust that God is really the one who assures our well-being.

Trust in God's care and love for us then becomes the reason we know that we are important

("great"), and we don't have to prove our importance by running after fame, fortune, or power. We are then free to turn our attention to caring for others.

Scripture tells us that Jesus spent 40 days in the desert while the devil told him he needed to grab power, riches, and control so that he could be "somebody." Jesus was able to reject the temptations because he already knew he was "somebody" -- a beloved son of God. It is that same knowledge and belief about ourselves which will enable us to resist the temptations of our culture. With a deep sense of God's love for us, we have nothing to fear and nothing to prove.

Blessings, Fr. Garry

Mt 4: 1-11