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I thought I screwed up Lent

Jocelyn A. Sideco | Mar. 26, 2012 Young Voices

I, too, have a confession to make [1]. I didn't give up anything for Lent. For someone so attached to the poetic rhythm of the liturgical calendar, I failed to do something "special" for Lent.

I suppose I could give you all these superficial excuses about not having time, being too busy, just forgetting that it's Friday, but that would not get to the heart of the issue.

I even thought of saying that I am just tired. Tired of the giving something up just to get back into my previous habits. Tired of trying something new just to do more. Tired of broken monologues and debates that keep the same positions.

But all of these excuses would merely be symptoms of a deeper resistance: My pride has really gotten me away from God.

I first noticed it when I started making exceptions for myself and challenging God's grace: "Wow, God was really looking out for me. I wasn't supposed to park there, AND I didn't even get a ticket. Whew!"

Then I puffed up my chest even further when I was asked to consult on a number of different projects: "Surely, there is no one like me who could do this job. Obviously, I'm special."

And finally, my pride got in the way when I noticed myself putting off connecting with friends whose pain and illness were center stage, taking for granted the limited time we may have together to enjoy one another's company.

My unprocessed grief is getting in the way of my relationship with God. I placed myself in the midst of things as opposed to placing God and God's glory in the center of it all. Now I must get up, wipe the dust off myself and continue to turn back to God and God's ways of mercy, compassion, tenderness and love. This Lent is truly preparing me for a better Easter.

My Lent has not involved an outward habit, but an inner shift, a personal recognition, a definite change that impacts everything. As much as I said that I work for the greater glory of God, my recklessness and pridefulness led me to boast in myself and not in the Lord.

So, I turn. I turn to seek counsel, I turn to ask for forgiveness, I turn to receive resolution and the beginnings of rebuilding my relationship with God.

In fact, I'm trying something new now. People snicker when I tell them I struggle to be anywhere on time. (For those of you who know me, I'm sure you are laughing right now!) Well, I looked beneath my behavior to find my fear of inefficient time. I figure if I just arrived on time, that would limit those awkward conversations about the weather or about the kids. In fact, if I arrived a few minutes into the meeting, I would have missed the inefficient time altogether and just gotten to the "business" of things.

Then I saw a glimmer of possibility: What if my resistance to that pre-business space really spoke about my reluctance to wait and just be in the "not yet"? What would happen if I stayed in the "not yet"?

As I prayed about it, I thought of my giddiness about Holy Saturday. Actually, I thought about the celebration of the Holy Triduum, the major liturgy that connects Lent and Easter and the time when we remember Christ's passion and death. Besides the beautiful liturgy divided into Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, I look forward to the waiting that happens on Holy Saturday. There is nothing else to do but wait. You have just been through hell and back recollecting Jesus's passion and death, and now you sit with the disciples, nervous, terrified and sad. We all know that the weekend leads to the celebration of Easter and the truth of the Resurrection, but it seems to me we like to speed up to that moment without processing our uncertainty.

I realized that even in these everyday moments, I would speed through life, experience the passion and death of relationships and ideas, then skip right past the grief and anxiety and fear to the immediate satisfaction of the newness of a relationship or experience again. And the cycle would continue.

Holy Saturday has become an everyday vehicle of space, time and ritual that affords me the opportunity to bridge an end of an experience to the possibility of a new one. It is paved with quietness, emptiness, fear and anxiety. This waiting is what I am working on this Lent: the ability to regularly wait and put spaces of faithfulness in between the hecticness of all the moments of my days. This is the space where I can prepare myself for the unknown and open myself up to the miracle of Easter and the promise of new life.

Take a moment to consider how you experience Holy Saturday. Consider how your community celebrates this space of uncertainty and faith. Consider how the church is empty and quiet for 24 hours. How can you expand this space of waiting to make more room for the resurrected Christ in your life?

[Jocelyn A. Sideco is a founding member of Contemplatives in Action, an urban ministry and retreat experience that began as a response to the needs in post-Katrina New Orleans and now continues as an online ministry offering spirituality resources for those working for justice throughout the world. Visit contemplativesinaction.org [2] for more information.]

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