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It's time for spring cleaning of the soul

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NCR Today

"Lent is the springtime of the soul," Pius Parsch writes.

I did not tidy my garden last fall. The weather was so mild I was afraid of stimulating growth. Besides, it was wet and muddy out. Sort of like the Church these days.

Spring is the time for cleaning our houses, clearing the dead leaves and stems from the garden, examining the state of our souls and encouraging some new spiritual shoots. This year it is also, as we choose a new pope, a time for deep reflection in our participation in the life of the Church.

I have a friend, a Unitarian subscriber to *NCR*, who complains to me about our Catholic habit of capitalizing "Church." His view is that church is church. And perhaps he's right. But to me the Church, capitalized, is a spiritual capital, deserving our respect and calling to holiness.

On the other hand, part of the reason I love the Church is that we are pretty public sinners. When I read an article like "Who Paid the Bill for Mahony's Cardinal Hat?" by Thomas Doyle in *NCR* last week, I am horrified. Cardinal Mahony had access to the tools of power, and for 10 years, he used them to evade responsibility for evil done by priests. Now he has responsibility to vote for a new pope.

I'd like a small share of that responsibility to elect the pope, but my point is that Mahony's bad behavior doesn't incline me to leave the Church. Rather, I want to help make us all better. I want the new pope to listen more closely to the people of God, and I, too, want to listen more closely.

I want the new pope to use his pruning shears with care, encouraging new growth as he cuts out the dead wood. Me, too. As I prune my apricots and roses these next few weeks, I plan to revisit my own resolutions to be a better person and develop a new strategy or two to carry out these resolutions. One of

them is to take the responsibility to develop a relationship with my bishop, reading his letters more closely and writing to him regularly about the urgent issues I see. Perhaps he'll answer, or not. But I will be doing a better job.

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