

IT'S WHAT YOU SHOW

Before going to celebrate Ash Wednesday Mass at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, I went to the Mall Barber Shop for a haircut. While waiting for the shop to open, I engaged in conversation with several men doing the same. The talk soon turned to Lent, fish dinners, and ashes. To my surprise, I was the only Catholic.

Once inside, I was impressed to see that a number of men (including John, the owner and head barber) came into the shop sporting ashes on their foreheads. I was not aware that religion could be easily discussed in a barbershop these days. But, we did. The outward sign of the ashes prompted us to that. It appeared to be the most natural thing to do.

Following my celebration of Ash Wednesday Mass, I had occasion to travel out of town. I stopped at a gas station and convenience store to check on Dennis, the owner of the store. He is not a Catholic, but recognizes me even without my roman collar and black suit. We have been on friendly terms for some time, and I wanted to know how he was doing with his heart problem.

“Oh, you have your cross on,” he said. I reached up and touched my forehead, having forgotten that I was still wearing ashes. He told me that a number of people had been in his store with ashes in the form of a cross on their foreheads. A brief discussion about religion followed.

That was the beginning of the Lenten Season. It was all so natural. Recognizing that we are people of God should be so in the days that follow, as well. Pope Saint Leo the Great put it in reverse using these words: “...what the Christian should be doing at all times should be done now with greater care and devotion,....” In other words, the Lenten Season ought to be no different from the rest of our lives, except in the intensity with which we live it.

The Sunday following Ash Wednesday, several hundred individuals from throughout our Diocesan Church gathered in one or the other of our two cathedral churches. They came to express their desire and readiness to embrace the life to which Jesus calls us through the Church and the Sacraments. These catechumens (now the “elect”) and candidates will be initiated into the Roman Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. When you speak with any one of them, you can tell that they are quite excited about what they realize is a very important step, one that will have consequences in their life. They are ready to have it show.

One of the things that we should always be doing is witnessing to our Faith. That does not mean that we flaunt it. However, neither should we hide it. We were not called to blend into the rest of society. Allowing signs of our Faith to show should be the most natural and exciting thing for us to do.

Bishop Andrew Grutka used to say repeatedly, “It’s not what you know, it’s what you show.” A good practice during Lent is to allow our Faith to show. That can be as simple as making the Sign of the Cross in public (such as in a restaurant). Using an expression such as “God bless you” and being courteous to others speak loudly. Acknowledging that one’s accomplishments in life are signs of favor from the Almighty testifies to the reality of who we truly are.

We are a people of the Light. That is the Easter for which Lent is meant to prepare us.