

THE DISCIPLINE OF LENT

We are well into the Holy Season of Lent. It is a time of preparing ourselves to celebrate the great solemnity of Easter. In order to do that, we are invited to a personal and spiritual adjustment or reformation. During this time, we are also encouraged to give up legitimate pleasures as a way of entering into the passion of the Lord, whose suffering and death won for us forgiveness, victory over permanent death, and the promise of eternal life.

One of the meanings for the word “suffer” is “to allow,” - as in some of the translations of Sacred Scripture where Jesus says, “Suffer the little children to come to me.” While selecting a form of penance for ourselves can be good, accepting the ones the Lord sends our way is more beneficial. Such penances are also more difficult. Discipline is like that; and, Lent is a season of discipline.

Jesus allowed in his life what the Father ordained. That is, He accepted without complaint what was intended to be. This included putting up with his disciples, allowing himself to be ridiculed by his own people, and submitting to the vindictiveness of others even to the point of death. All that served God’s plan for our salvation.

God’s life-plan for us is not always clear. After all, He is God and we are not. As a loving parent, He tries to guide us. But, we neglect or refuse “to read the signs” that He provides for our guidance. Instead, we work to eliminate the signs.

We do not like long delays at traffic lights. They often appear unnecessary and infringe on our desire to rush through life. If we were to eliminate the traffic light, we would not have to stop and we could do what we want to do a little sooner. However, we also increase the chance of our being hit by another car. So, in the end, the annoying lights are for our benefit.

It appears to me that we, in today’s society, strive too much for control (of things and people). And, we usually lose control and mess things up in the process.

Remember when you were a child and others teased you? Your parents probably told you not to let it bother you and the kids would stop. That was difficult, but it worked. You allowed it, the ridiculing lost its force of control, and the bullies went on to pick on someone else. And, you became a stronger person as a result.

If we could but trust God and “suffer” the situations that we face, we would not only have less stress but could better handle the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Instead, we let things and people upset us, thereby losing control rather than gaining it.

The Holy Season of Lent could be compared to a gym. It is a time for exercise, - of the spiritual kind. Whether we ourselves choose the form of that exercise or submit to the Divine Trainer for his guidance, such discipline will make us a stronger and better person.

However, the Trainer usually knows best and He has already laid out the specific plan for you and for me. Those annoying things and people have something to do with it. So, let us learn to suffer them and become a people of the resurrection by Easter.