

ASHES TO EASTER



Forty-seven days separate Ash Wednesday from Easter. If you're fasting from sweets, television, swearing, these 47 days seem like an eternity. Especially in the beginning as you struggle between a committed fast and a craving; when temptation and habit overlap until separating the two becomes impossible and you very, very reluctantly settle for a carrot instead of a cookie.

As the calendar moves steadily closer to Easter, forty-seven days seemed like a long time ago. They say that it takes 30 days to break a habit, and after you've passed the 30-day mark of Lent, the temptation and cravings play less havoc with your self-control. And the day you started feels like eons ago.

My pastor once said that Lent is not a diet. How true. Lent is an opportunity to move closer to God. It is an opportunity for a personal transformation.

Lent becomes much more than 47 days, and even more than the one-eighth of a year during which we deliberately jettison the excess baggage that separates us from God.

Lent is this chunk of time where we journey from ashes to Easter; from death and humility to the promise of eternal life, celebrated on the greatest day in Christianity: Easter. Though we begin Lent with fasting and prayer, knowing that celebration awaits us at the finish, for many of us it's difficult to imagine getting through these 47 days.

But just as we near the celebratory finish line of this marvelous day of our faith, we pause for Good Friday to remember the Crucifixion.

The Crucifixion is an example of eucatastrophe, a word created by J. R. R. Tolkien to describe the wonderful that comes from the tragic: from death came the victory of the Resurrection.

Catastrophe: On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning and saw the stone removed from the tomb. She thought that they had taken the Lord from the tomb.

The other disciple whom Jesus loved went into the tomb, saw and believed, though he did not yet understand.

Eucatastrophe: The Gospel doesn't tell us what Simon Peter believed at the tomb, though we learn that later Peter understood and preached that God raised Jesus of Nazareth on the third day.

Like Lent, when we begin our efforts to organize to create a just world, the finish line of institutional change may seem a long way away. We must have the imagination that our world can be a better place.

Like our Lenten practice, if our social justice actions are not personally transformative, then are they really social justice – Catholic – do they bring us closer to God?

Like our Lenten practice, we can move from *committing* to efforts that will make a difference to *knowing* that our part is an essential contribution to the effort.

Like the Crucifixion, we may face disillusionment and lose hope. Fear not: from the ashes of failure comes the Easter of triumph.

Like the disciples, we can move from despair to believing, from believing to understanding, from understanding to preaching, from talking about it to organizing.

Easter is the greatest day in Christianity; the journey begins in ashes.

(Readings for Easter Sunday)



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