

We made it through Superbowl Sunday and we are headed into Lent. Today, I am to bridge the gap between the two. As we prepare for Ash Wednesday and our "spiritual spring cleaning" during Lent, we read some of the most intense scripture in the bible, setting a high bar to aim for as we work on our personal transformation.

Transformation happens when we let go of ourselves and our egos and choose God's path. Transformation is a lifelong journey as we attempt to engage the heart of Christ with each decision. We can think of our "transformation" as our "transportation" to eternal life. Our Uber ride to heaven.

Our reading from Sirach says, "If you choose, you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live. Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him." This reading is very direct, but it speaks to the promise of eternal life. It's a choice we make every day, in every decision we make.

Our reading from 1st Corinthians says, "We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of THIS age. We speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory." Mature wisdom is the goal that we achieve little-by-little, Lent-by-Lent.

But we live in a rapidly changing world, with technology, AI, and media bombarding us at every turn. In contrast, God's wisdom is "predetermined" from the beginning and never changes. It IS mysterious and hidden. It requires seeking, choosing, and keeping our eyes and thoughts on heaven.

We don't have to call the Uber to get to heaven, the Uber is calling us, but in a subtle, patient, and loving way. And when we fail to answer, we don't get a bad rating from our driver, we receive forgiveness and a clean slate from our merciful Lord.

Our gospel reading comes from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus teaches the crowd a new path to holiness by focusing on the root of evil that leads to sin. He identifies the vices that lead to mortal sins, how anger can lead to murder, how lust can end in adultery. He calls out pride when he says that a face-to-face apology cannot be replaced by a sacrifice at the altar. In all these cases and the others in the gospel, Jesus asks us to search our hearts to understand and root-out the source of our sins.

Christ knows our human nature, he created it, and he lived a life, though perfect, as a man on earth. He knows that our hearts are prone to the poison of vices. Today's gospel is about shedding light on the reality of sin, the sin that keeps us from the abundant joy that awaits us in the transformation process.

So, how do we apply these difficult teachings? Catholic Theologian John Shea says, "The Sermon on the Mount suggests we search our mind and come to self-knowledge around a few crucial issues. We should know how anger rises in us, comes to expression, and then subsides. We should watch lust and note how it grips us and rushes us along paths we may not choose. We should also come to understand how we want SHORTCUTS to forgiveness, how we hesitate and sometime completely stall when it comes to initiating reconciling conversations."

This, difficult work of self-reflection, enables our spiritual transformation through understanding and healing. Lent is a time when we put our faith into action through prayer, fasting, and alms giving. As we do these things, let's take time to self-reflect on the vices that weigh down our hearts. Consider how the human vices of pride, greed, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth operate in our lives. Look at these not with the wisdom of this age, but with God's wisdom, with Christ, our brother, as our guide.

Meister Eckhart, a 14th-century German theologian, said, "Silence is where integrity is best preserved." He believed that silence allows the soul to remain undistracted by the "multiplicity" of the world, fostering a direct, internal encounter with the Divine. Find a place in your day for silence. Come to the Church, or sit in your garden, or walk on the beach, or light a candle in your kitchen. Take time to pray for God's guidance and listen to your heart.

If you have a young family or other circumstances, it may be difficult to find silent time during your busy day. Let's draw on the advice of Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite monk from the 15th century. His book entitled, "The Practice of the Presence of God," focuses on keeping close to God during busy times. He wrote, "God requires no great matters of us; a little remembrance of Him from time to time; a little adoration; sometimes to pray for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, and sometimes to return Him thanks for the favors He has given you, and to console yourself with Him as often as you can."

Brother Lawrence was the cook in his monastery and cultivated a constant dialog with God throughout his busy days. He also shared his love for God in his kitchen where he fed the cart drivers, grocers and fisherman who stopped by and he gave them his practical advice on how God really cared for their concerns. We too should look for the opportunity to bring God into our conversations as we encourage others in their transformation process. I placed a copy of Brother Lawrence's book in the back of the Church in case you would like to take a photo of it.

As we enter into Lent, we ask for God's grace and wisdom to advance our transformation, our transportation into His kingdom. We pray for the courage to self-reflect and gain a better

understanding of our vices that lead to sin. With God's help we can all move closer to the goal of choosing Him in every choice in our lives.