

LENT: RECLAIMING OUR BEING CLAIMED BY GOD

As we know, our Lenten journey is to prepare us for the entering of the great sacred three days of the Triduum in which our faith is renewed. The days of Lent also prepare for an Easter season in which we celebrate new life in the risen Lord. So with a few weeks to go, what are we supposed to do? What should be our strategy? For me, I believe it is helpful to delve into what the Easter season means to us. It is a time for us to live our Baptismal commitment in a renewed way. So it begs the question, is what we plan to do for Lent helping us prepare to live our Baptismal vows with renewed energy and renewed faith? If it is not, then maybe we should decide to prepare differently. In the Easter liturgy, we renew our Baptismal promises, we respond to the questions of rejecting our sinfulness and embracing our belief in the Father, in Jesus the risen Son and the Holy Spirit. If this is an important part of the liturgy of Easter and it is unique to that celebration, it might serve us well to recall our Baptism. On that day the sign of the cross was traced on our forehead, not only by the priest or deacon presiding, but also by our parents and godparents. This important gesture is when we are claimed by God. We are welcomed into His divine family and we are received with great joy into a loving union with Him.

For Lent, we are invited to renew ourselves in this beginning. How did our Baptism occur? Who influenced us to live our faith? How has our faith formation been enhanced over the years? If it hasn't been, why not? On the day of Baptism, we were received, anointed and claimed by God as one of His own. It is up to us to reclaim that feeling and that experience so that when at Easter we renew our vows, we are ready, we are committed and we are amazed at God's desire and love for us that He sent His Son to die for us.

Lent is about finding that place where we feel and can experience the magnitude of being claimed by God and received with great joy into His loving arms.

The work ahead is not easy, but it is worth it.



Father John Ouper

TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY

In the Gospel today the word authority stands out. The listeners in the synagogue are astonished and after the healing and calling out of the demon, the crowd is amazed. What is it about this Jesus? What sets Him apart? The word authority is highly charged and can become explosive and inflame many. Differing viewpoints call forth different responses to those in authority. We must ask ourselves after the summer, fall and winter we have had, who do we believe has authority? We are in a time of unrest. We are in a time where villains can be made of anyone who disagrees with our ideologies and flashpoints flare up constantly before us. From what we feed ourselves in the news media and the examples of many who are called to serve and protect, division, hatred and disrespect become the battlefield within our society. Authority should never be used this way if we are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we ask ourselves what is amazing about the authority of Jesus, it is that He sat in a place of humility with the community in the synagogue. He was not a scribe, so He could not sit in the place of honor. Jesus led from among the community. He spoke wisdom with a confidence that came with love. He did not make anyone feel small or belittle anyone. This was the new teaching. He would not let Himself get caught up in the games of the local authorities who had a power of this world and believed they needed to protect it. His authority came from the genuine love He had for all God's people. His compassion was a part of every word He spoke. He would speak of how the Kingdom of God is different. It is a kingdom of forgiveness, a kingdom of surrender, a kingdom of self-giving rather than self-righteousness.

The Jesus I have come to know in my life, in my relationship with Him is a gentle healer who speaks most harshly to the devil and to evil and its surrounding darkness, while having love for His enemy and a sinner like me. When we know this Jesus, we realize the maturity of this world will always be flawed and our expectations of it must take into account what the authority of Jesus is asking of us.

Embrace and allow yourself to be embraced by the One who has this kind of authority.



Father John Ouper