

in a
WordTM

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**Lent Is A Time
To Remember
The Richness Of Our Faith**

Photos by: Rev. James Pawlicki, SVD

LIVING A STRICTEST LENT 365 DAYS A YEAR

by

Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD

When Lent was really Lent back in the day before Vatican Council II, a younger person went around hungry just about all the time, trying to cope with the Law of Fasting that forbade more than one full meal a day for 40 days, but did allow for a small amount of food in the morning and in the evening. All Catholics from the completion of their twenty-first to the end of their sixtieth year, unless lawfully excused, were bound to fast.

More distressfully than wistfully, I remember that some theologians even dabbled with attempting to translate “a small amount of food” into ounces per portion. Excepting the unfortunate victims of anorexia nervosa, this was a dismal ambience for happy living.

For many, it was even harder to deal with the Law of Abstinence that forbade the use of flesh meat and the juice thereof (soup, etc.). Eggs, cheese, butter and seasonings of food were permitted. Most folks, especially in places like New Orleans, were delighted that seafood was allowed. Only those who, somewhat enigmatically, did not like seafood were not pleased. All Catholics seven years old and over were obliged to abstain.

On the other hand, whether we talk about the old or the new Lenten abstinence, it must be noted that there are people who do not like meat. They are obliged to find some form of substitute penance comparable to the inconveniences of the law of abstinence.

It was easy to understand with laughter that the lawmakers of the Church lived in the insulated, isolated atmosphere of the Vatican in faraway Rome. Imagine ordering the salivating citizens of the Gulf Coast to do penance by eating seafood instead of meat! All I can say in their name as their friend and advocate is, “Send us more penance like that!”

Using a deft touch of conviction and seduction via TV and radio, Gulf Coast restaurants bombard Christians with Lenten seafood menus equal to the desires and requirements of the most elegant and exquisite soirees, gala celebrations and festive banquets. It takes an ingenious imagination to work such menus into acts of penance.

Practically child’s play by comparison with the old, the current law of fast requires that everyone from the age of 18 to 59 must fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. It is astounding that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) prescribes this fast for only Ash Wednesday and Good Friday – just two of forty days.

Current law obligates everyone 14 or older to abstain from meat (and items made with meat) on [Ash Wednesday](#), [Good Friday](#) and all the Fridays of [Lent](#). It is not generally known that the legendary no-meat-on-Friday law was not eliminated but changed to require that everyone 14 or older must either abstain from meat (and items made with meat) on all Fridays of the year or substitute some other form of penance commensurate to abstinence from meat. Perhaps most Catholics still eat fish on Friday.

Moral theologians excuse people from fasting and/or abstinence for reasons of sickness, pregnancy, nursing mothers, mentally-ill individuals, people who are frail, as well as guests who cannot excuse themselves without offending the host. As a vegan, I have learned to school people quickly on my food regimen without offending a host.

As if miffed by the new lax laws on fasting and abstinence, most Traditionalists fast for all 40 days, according to the pre-Vatican II practice. They also abstain year-round on ALL Fridays and Ember Days (formerly at the beginning of the four seasons ordered by the [Church](#) as days of fast and abstinence). Traditionalists also fast during Advent.

By the way, Traditionalists – not to be confused with everyday traditional Catholics – believe that there should be a restoration of many or all of the [liturgical](#) forms, public and private devotions and presentations of Catholic teachings that were prevalent in the Catholic Church before the [Second Vatican Council](#) (1962–65).

As long as they are intent on true repentance and penance, those Traditionalists are within their rights in following the fast and abstinence disciplines of pre-Vatican II. However, their mortal fault lies in their holier-than-thou attitude that not only disagrees with but disdains the leadership of the Pope and bishops worldwide.

They – and we – must always be aware of the Master’s words to the Pharisees who criticized his reaching out to sinners in Matthew 9:12-13, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

We can begin to espouse this call by fasting from our surplus of material things, including the glut of foods that we don’t need; by adopting wholesome habits directed toward helping and caring for others; by giving alms, thus helping and healing our sisters and brothers in need; by devoting ourselves to prayer for all, including our enemies.



What are Black Catholics saying about Theological Reflection?

by

Michael P. Howard

Recently, I facilitated a group of Black Catholics on the process of Theological Reflections (TR) for their ministry. Using the University of Dayton's Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF), this on-line course generated a learning environment that was very rewarding. This class had discussions that centered on what is TR, understanding certain Catholic practices, and how to capture personal spiritual growth in ministry. Fr. Pedro Arrupe, a Jesuit, has been credited with coining the term TR in 1970. Fr. Arrupe explained this spiritual exercise to his community as "rethinking" the issues of their day to think evangelically and theologically, to capture a "Divine solution" to the problems of this society. Therefore, here we are called to reflect on our experiences in life and seek the Lord while he can be found (Is. 55:6).

A common mistake that many people make in understanding TR is to compare it to a Bible Study. When attending a Bible Study the participants expect that they will study a particular passage or theme in the Bible. Scripture is the focus in this small group sharing. With TR the facilitator may prompt the discussion within a group with a question or an event that recently occurred. Therefore, one's personal reflective experience with God is the catalyst for sharing stories. A scripture reference may be later incorporated in the discussion to acknowledge God's action in one's life, this is the theological component. Finally, participants are called to action. We must "Be doers of the word and not hearers only" (Ja. 1:22).

During this course some participants expressed their understanding of TR after the assignment in this manner...
"I feel that I have been doing this for a long time and didn't know I was doing it. I also felt a cultural significance to this in that the contemplative and wholistic aspects of African American Spirituality is expressed in this same way. In so much as our ancestors possessed the ability to see the godly connection of all things and see God in all things... to me, this is the same thing as TR. I know I do it all of the time."

Another added, *"I also agree that most of us have been doing this without knowing it for most of our lives. I think that there is something in our ancestral archetype that connects us to God and asks us to attend, assert, and process our experiences in that light."*

Another participant added *"I am being challenged further with TR to go beyond the surface and dive deeper to look into the heart of the Bible and see things as God sees. In addition, I have to share and reflect with other people. Doing this TR course has enabled me to see the integration of my experiences and those of others with our African American culture along with the strong tradition of the Church since coming to the church of St. Teresa of Avila."*

This course allowed us also to reflect on the sacrament of reconciliation and to grapple with being faithful to "Tradition." Using an article by St. Anthony's press, the class reflected on God's forgiveness as a celebration of God's love towards us. One participant shared this thought: *"I actually learned a lot about reconciliation, more than I ever knew. The most important thing about confession is ... What Jesus does for us."* In reference to being faithful towards Tradition, each participant shared some moving insights to their understanding of the Church's teachings.

In the end, personal growth is truly the objective in this course for individuals. After sharing their story and seeing God in their life, everyone came to understand a fundamental truth echoed throughout this course, "The more you see, the more you'll see."

TR engages its participants to see God in their story by reflecting on events that inspired them to trust in God. You may hear them say, "After my car accident, I trusted in the Lord and he showed me the way." TR then moves one to hear a Word from God which is revelatory. Here God speaks to them and they recall God's grace in their stories. A story like Mary and Martha, Two sons, Good Shepherd, etc., may call the individual to trust God more deeply. God's word appears as a reflection that leads to a revelation to make one to think theological.

Finally, through TR everyone is directed to a prayer life that is transforming, a life that is called to action in our church and community. As doers of the word, God calls all baptized Christians to serve the hungry, the poor, the naked, the disenfranchised, the sick and everyone else who has failed to experience the double love commandment, the love of God and love from their neighbor.

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in a word or two

The following information comes to us courtesy of Shannen Dee Williams:

"I just wanted to share a short piece that I wrote for *U.S. Catholic Magazine's* online blog in honor of Black History Month. Just to warn you, it has been edited. So, just in case you think I forgot about Mother Lange, Venerable Henriette Delille, and a host of other praise-worthy women, I didn't. Several photographs were not included, and I had a serious word limit! But, I will be working on a more substantial piece soon. :)"

Please share this with anyone you think might be interested.

<http://www.uscatholic.org/blog/201402/celebrating-unsung-black-catholic-women-us-history-28501>

<http://shar.es/FebAr>

All the best,

Shannen Dee Williams

P.S. Feel free to share some of my earlier pieces also.

The links are below.

<http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/culture/7446/>

jesus_santa_and_now_sound_of_music_s_mother_abbess/

<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/10/segregated-sisterhoods-and-the-mercurial-politics-of-racial-truth-telling/>



Basketball game participants and fans. The priests are in gray shirts.

A different approach to promoting vocations recently took place in Opelousas Louisiana. Holy Ghost Catholic Church, the largest African American Catholic Church in the country, promoted a basketball game. The game was to raise funds for Holy Ghost Youth Ministry; to build community and promote vocations. The game was held at Opelousas Catholic School gymnasium.

What made the game unique was that the competition involved Catholic priests! Yes, the game was between a team of Opelousas Catholic students and the **"Running Revs"** (Divine Word Missionary priests in the area.). Father Jaison Mangalath, SVD, pastor, and Parish Associate, Father Bartlomiej Jasilek, SVD, had a short time to organize everything, but they did it. Since the event, the priests have been getting great feedback from those who attended. It was a great time of fellowship and fun. No final score was given to us here at **IN A WORD!**



The awareness that ordinary people can do extraordinary things through perseverance was the theme that reverberated March 14-16 at "Walking with the Saints: A symposium on Black Catholics, their Concerns and the Journey to Sainthood" presented by the Institute for Black Catholic

Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana.

The Symposium focused on four African American role models. They are...

- Pierre Toussaint, a former slave who gained freedom at age 45, was a hairdresser, a religious lay person who performed charitable works, is buried at St. Patrick's in New York and is now venerable in the process;
- Mother Mary Lange, founder of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, who educated immigrant and African-American children in Baltimore and whose cause for canonization was opened in 1991
- Sister of the Holy Family founder Venerable Mother Henriette Delille,
- And Father Augustus Tolton.

Christine Bordelon wrote an in depth article about the Symposium in the Clarion Herald, the paper of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. She noted that Keynote speaker M. Shawn Copeland, Ph.D., a Boston College professor, summarized how the four being considered for canonization found ways to retain their faith amid obstacles.

"They might not have been martyrs who endured torture and death in refusal to betray their relationship with God or repudiate their faith," Copeland said, "but their lives of practical charity, audacious hope, bold confidence and subversive love caused them to endure a bloodless martyrdom carried out under the auspices of the society in which they lived and even the very Church they love."

Dr. Copeland hoped the Catholic Church would, one day, recognize them as saints, explaining how saints are holy men or women who first serve God, abide by his rule and live in righteousness and love everyone. All four did that – they held steadfast to their faith amidst the evils of slavery and segregation.

To read entire article go to <http://clarionherald.info/>

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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