

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Giving Up

I give up. Do you?

It is Lent. As we all know, we are supposed to “give up” something for Lent—chocolate, hamburgers, cigarettes, reading the *National Enquirer* ... something, anything that shows a willingness to sacrifice and do some penance for these forty days. And right about now, less than two weeks into Lent, after giving up something ... I give up.

I’m weak. I’m undisciplined. I’m lazy. I’m ... about to reach for a peanut butter cup and a tub of ice cream. I’m pathetic.

How many of us really follow through on our Lenten sacrifices? A show of hands, please.

I thought so.

I suspect it was easier to give up things hundreds of years ago, when there wasn’t much to give up anyway. Give up cold gruel for breakfast? Okay. No problem.

But we 21st century Catholics are spoiled. We want our cell phones. And our 500 channels of cable. Sacrifice, for too many of us, means ordering a tall decaf from Starbucks, instead of the venti.

So maybe what we need these days is not to do *without*, but simply to *do*.

Buy that chocolate peanut butter cup. And share it with the homeless man outside your office. While you’re at it, buy him a Starbucks tall decaf. The extra dollar you would have spent for a venti? Slip it into the collection basket next Sunday. Or into the box for the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Send a postcard to a friend, for no reason at all, just to say hello. Call a distant relative to say how much you appreciated his photocopied Christmas letter.

Visit the Central Park Zoo, in this cold and inhospitable time of year, and make a donation and wave at the polar bears and the penguins. The zoo will appreciate it, the animals will like it, and St. Francis of Assisi will smile.

Speaking of Francis: If you’re shopping down at Herald Square, or running through Penn Station to get a train, stop by St. Francis of Assisi Friary, on 32nd Street, and slip a five into the box for their famous breadline.

Or walk a block west, to St. John the Baptist’s Bread of Life Food Pantry. There, every Wednesday from 12:45 to 2:45 P.M., volunteers pass out food to more than 500 hungry people. Gifts of time or money are always welcome.

Or take the money you would have spent on a manicure and take a child to the circus. Give someone an hour of enchantment, and expect nothing in return.

Mind you, I’m not an advocate for shrugging off the practice of giving up during Lent. There is abundant grace to be found in sacrifice and a little bit of suffering.

But maybe we all should remind ourselves, at this particular moment in the church calendar, that “giving up” starts with “giving.”

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STATIONS OF THE CROSS

“Praying the Stations with Mary, the Mother of Jesus”
Fridays during Lent, at 7:30 p.m., followed by Benediction

February 28, 2016 - **Third Sunday of Lent**