

Dear Friends in Christ:

Lent came along rather late in the Church's rhythm of life. The lifestyle of repentance which it symbolizes became necessary as we started recognizing and telling the truth about how much we are still in bondage to the world, the devil, and the flesh. What started as forty days of preparation for baptismal candidates in the Western Church gradually became a period of abstinence, penitence, and reflection.

This year, most of the season of Lent falls in March. Traditionally Christians in the west gave up sex and eating meat for the 40 days of Lent. Perhaps these practices led to spiritual humility and discipline, but they largely missed the point. To paraphrase Richard John Neuhaus, the spiritual failures on our part come down to three things: faithfulness, faithfulness, and faithfulness. This is of course, not a new insight, St. Paul pointed out that whatever does not come from faith is sin (Romans 14:14).

During the month of March, I encourage you to examine your life for patterns of unfaithfulness to God and to the Kingdom of God. These patterns are usually far more egregious than scattered lapses in behavior. Do you turn on cable news so that you can be renewed in hate and anger every day? Are there family members that you adamantly refuse to forgive? Do you pass over Scripture reading and prayer in order to doom scroll on Youtube or Tiktok? Do you fail to put the effort into being a blessing to those closest around you—preferring to see yourself as a citizen of the world rather than a pious husband or wife, son or daughter? Do you let compassion fatigue turn you into a spiritually stingy person? Has any excuse not to be in worship on Sunday morning become for you a good excuse?

Every Sunday participates in the Sunday of the Resurrection, but in Lent, our Sundays put one foot in the waters of Lenten observance with the texts, music, and colors being most prominent. They give us an opportunity to reflect, repent, confess and be forgiven not because we are worthy or we deserve it. We are not and we don't. We can only be made worthy and ready *by the holy and precious blood and the innocent suffering and death* of our Lord Jesus Christ (Small Catechism).

Here is the question for March: What patterns of unfaithfulness in me made it necessary for the Lord Jesus to die for my sins? Answering that question and amending our lives should keep all of us plenty busy.

Yours in Christ,

John Shepherd McKenzie