

Weighing Baggage As We Embark on Great Lent

A month ago I went to the airport to pick our Diocesan Vicar and Executive Director who flew in for our 2017 Assembly meeting. One had a large checked bag and one had the tiniest of carry-on. When you go on a journey, do you pack heavy? Are you a planner and preparer to take care of every possible contingency? Or do you pack light when you travel; going with the flow and confident you already have what you need?

By my nature I am more the first type. I am travelling to Chicago tomorrow morning for our annual Diocesan clergy Lenten retreat. The idea is to pack lightly, and as far as clothes I will. I have my black robe, who cares what you wear underneath that! But the baggage we carry is much more than clothes. I have been asked to lead a session for my fellow clergy on the theology and practice of forgiveness; I need to plan and prepare for that. I have to meet with the Archbishop to discuss our new pledge system, I have to plan and prepare for that. I have to meet with the Vicar to finalize the details of our clergy conference here in May, I have to plan and prepare for that. These are important things, and they need to be done well. Yet the entire point of Lent, and the clergy Lenten retreat is that this is the one time of the year to pack lightly; to let go of all the baggage, the preparation and the cares, and rely on God to provide.

What about you? You are all coming with me. No- don't worry-you're not coming with me to the coldest city on earth, Chicago. But you are coming with me, I hope, on the journey of great Lent which begins today, this evening. And unlike any other journey, you don't need a ticket for this trip, you don't need transportation, you just need to ask God to take you along with him. Many people don't take this simple first step, and so Lent isn't a spiritual journey of growth and health, it is just another season that comes and goes. But I beg you to be intentional and prayerful about your desire to journey with God this Lent; it is worth the trip!

Once you have decided that you are embarking on the journey of Lent this year, the main decision we each have to make, in manifold different ways, is what shall we pack? Are we travelling too heavy or too light?

All of us sometimes, and some of us all the time travel too heavy in our spiritual journey in general and Lent in particular. Jesus has a word for us this Lent; the same words he gave to his twelve Apostles when he sent them on their first missionary journey to preach and to heal. "Take nothing for the journey except a staff," said Jesus. "No bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt" (Mk 6:8-9). For some this Lent, the primary challenge is not to fast more, study harder, or give more to church and charities. These are important. But of primary importance is just to hear the immortal words of the Psalmist "Be Still and Know that I am God." Find ways this Lent to put down your bags, even if filled with Bibles and vestments, to spend time with the living God who inspires Bibles and vestments. To us who are travelling too heavy through this life, Jesus invites us this Lent "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Mt 11:28

All of us sometimes, and some of us all the time travel too lightly in our spiritual journey in general and Lent in particular. Jesus also has a word for us this Lent, the same words he told his twelve apostles when sending them off on their missionary journey after He was gone. "If you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one." Lk 22:36. If you have not paid enough attention, made enough commitment to your Lenten journey in the past, this year pledge to God to come to church more regularly, to read the Bible or faith-centered literature, to redouble our efforts at daily prayer to God. To us who are travelling too lightly through this life, Jesus invites us this Lent; "Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Mt 26:41

As the journey of great Lent opens majestically before us this year, let us all ponder deeply in what ways we are travelling too heavily and in which ways too lightly. Do we trust God enough to supply our every need? Are we also taking personal responsibility and planning to mature as Christians? As we weigh our baggage before embarking on great Lent, let us rejoice in the adventure before us and remember that going anywhere with God is always worth the trip, now and always; amen.