

REFLECTIONS...

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notice of the fasting and come to the aid of his people by sending the Messiah. Jesus' point is that the Messiah is here and therefore it is not appropriate to fast. But there would come a time when the 'Bridegroom' would no longer be with his followers.

With the death of Jesus, the 'Bridegroom' was taken away, and since that time his followers have once again fasted. Contrary to the popular notion of fasting as a public act, Jesus encourages his disciples to do so in secret. On Ash Wednesday we heard the Gospel of Matthew proclaim that fasting, prayer, and almsgiving should be done in secret so that "the Bridegroom who sees in secret will reward you". The reading from Isaiah the Prophet resonates with Jesus' word and spirit. Real fasting is not just giving up food and drink so that others may take notice, but fasting from the evils that bedevil us, from back-biting, from selfishness, from envy, from all the things we afflict upon ourselves and upon one another. Jesus is interested in a change of heart, not a change in weight.

All of us know how difficult it is first of all to admit that we need to change some hurtful practice in our lives and then set out to actually bring about a new way of living. The 'Bridegroom' is still with us to help us and guide us. We celebrate his victory over death and selfishness at every Eucharist. Today, in a special way we pray that with the power of this sacrifice He may help us attend to real fasting that will lead to our salvation.

-Fr. Thomas, OSB



Thoughts on Lent

In Jesus' world fasting, like everything else, was a very public act. One fasted in order to be seen by others to encourage them to join you in fasting or to win their help. By extension, it was hoped that God would take



Stained glass window of
St. Procopius in the Abbey's
lobby (see article that follows).

*On March 2, 1885, the Abbey
was founded. Our 125th year
celebration began with Solemn
Vespers and concert in the Abbey
Church.*

*The musical piece, Lumen
Christi, commissioned by noted
Pittsburgh composer, Nancy
Galbraith, featured Benet
Academy's Madrigal singers,
percussion, electric baroque
flute, and organ.*



Lent to Light

The people to whom St. John wrote his gospel--the faith community of Jesus of which St. John was a part--had their own share of suffering. Indeed, St. John indicates to them, that as they are rejected and persecuted for their faith, they will have a good share more suffering to bear.

Thus John writes to people who can identify with the blind man of this gospel. The message to them is loud and clear, that what Jesus did for the blind man, Jesus can do for them. They will be the children of the Light. And that the true darkness of this world, is the spiritual blindness represented by the Pharisees, whose only action is to condemn, to reject, to accuse; whereas the man formerly blind can now see. John's account of the healing, then, is a paradigm or example, which had deep meaning for his fellow believers, and is like word full of importance for us.

It is important for us to understand that the Pharisees of whom John wrote, and who confronted Jesus on other occasions, were not all bad people, at least under our usual definition of "bad." We could apply other terms to them. We could label them rigid, brittle, and legalistic, all of which would fit. They were by-the-book religious conservatives, willing to fight and defend the smallest detail – the jots and tittles – of the moral-ethical-religious code.

And so they were ready to condemn anything they saw as deviating from what they deemed was the strictest interpretation of how one must think and believe and act.

Now some may be making mental comparisons to our contemporary situation. Yes, good, well-meaning people can have the blinds pulled down on the windows of their minds, keeping them from considering anything new.

And thus the Sacred Scriptures portray them as ready to condemn and punish wrong-doing; while Jesus taught forgiveness and reconciliation.

In John's story of Jesus' healing of the blind man, the Pharisees were more concerned that healing a person constituted work – work being prohibited on the Sabbath – than they were that a man blind from birth should miraculously gain sight.

The light of which St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, is not something that we have naturally, as is the sight of our eyes. One can be physically blind and yet have a life filled with light.

The "light of faith" is something that must be gained, learned, cultivated and nurtured. It is the light of the Spirit that has the power to banish the works of evil and truly change the world.

We associate light with vision, because that is the way we commonly perceive light. We learn our own spiritual vision by being taught by precept and by example. And we are fortunate if our faith journey began when we were children; for then we really learn how to live as children of God in the world. Every person of faith learned their faith vision from others – from parents, friends, teachers. And every one of us is a bearer of the Light for others.

Consider a true story that spans several years, of Sister Helen, a teacher in Minnesota. It is a long story, but an important one.

Sister Helen's first assignment was as teacher of 34 third graders. She loved them all, but found young Mark "one in a million," with a "happy to be alive" attitude, even when mischievous. Mark's one outstanding fault was that he talked incessantly, of as she frequently reminded him. "Thank you for correcting me, Sister," he would say. And she hardly knew what to make of that kind of response.

One morning her patience grew thin, when Mark talked, and she made a new-teacher mistake. "IF you say one more word, I am going to tape your mouth shut!" she said.

And seconds later, Chuck blurted out, "Mark is talking again." And while sister had not asked anyone to monitor Mark, she felt she had to act on what she had said. Sister Helen very deliberately took out a roll of masking tape and without a word went to Mark's desk and, taking two pieces of tape, made a big X over his mouth, and then walked back to the front of the room.

She glanced back at Mark to see how he was doing, and he winked at her. That did it! She started laughing, and the class cheered as she went back and removed the tape and gave a shrug of her shoulders. "Thanks for correcting me, Sister," Mark said.

The next year Sister Helen was assigned to teach junior high math. And six years later, young Mark appeared in her classroom again, only much more grown up and good looking.

One Friday things were not going well at all. The class had worked hard all week on some new math concepts, but with considerable frustration on the part of the teacher and the students. The students were edgy and cross with one another to the point that Sister Helen had to do something about it.

She stopped the math lesson, and had the class list the name of every person in the class on a sheet of paper; then they were to write down the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates.

The assignment took the rest of the class period to finish, and as they left the room each one handed in the papers. James smiled. And Mark said, "Thank you for teaching me, Sister. Have a good weekend." Sister Helen then wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and then listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday she gave each student his or her list.

The result was very interesting. She overheard some of the surprisingly happy things that the students read about themselves. No one ever mentioned the papers again in the class, and Sister never knew if they talked about them to friends or parents. But the exercise accomplished its purpose, and the students were once again happy with themselves and with each other.

Years later, Sister Helen learned that young Mark had been killed in the war in Vietnam. She went to his funeral the next day. She had never seen a military man in his coffin before. Mark was so handsome and mature.

She thought: "Mark, I would give all the masking tape in the world if only you would talk to me now."

At the graveside, the pastor said the usual prayers; and the bugler played taps; and one by one those who loved Mark passed by the coffin and sprinkled it with holy water. Sister Helen was the last one to bless the coffin with the holy water, that final reminder that he was baptized as one of the Children of Light. And as she stood there, one of the soldiers came up to her and asked; "Were you Mark's math teacher?" She nodded. "Mark talked about you a lot," he said.

After the funeral most of Mark's classmates met for lunch. They were waiting for Sister Helen. "We want to show you something," Mark's father said. "They

found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it." Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had been taped, folded, and refolded many times--the list of all the good things each of his classmates had said about him.

The others gathered around. James smiled and said: "I still have my list in the top drawer of my desk at home." Chuck's wife said, "Chuck asked me to put his in our wedding album." Another had hers saved in her diary. Another had hers in her wallet.

Some people keep a rabbit's foot, or a four leaf clover, or some other lucky piece. These classmates had something far more valuable: years before, their classmates had found good things to say about them.

Think how often looking at that list might have served to restore one's self-esteem, one's sense of worth. And all this was prompted by a teacher, a follower of Jesus, who cared for her students. There are too many *put-downs* in life; so many *failures* that can lead to sadness or depression. We need to be reminded of the *good things*, the Light in the darkness. The good things about *ourselves*. Often we are invited to sing that song or say that prayer attributed to St. Francis: "Lord, make me an *instrument* of your peace." And then follows a list of good works. Well, we have done some of them. We are not useless servants. And it is a good work to assure others that they have been at various times, and perhaps in unsuspected ways, a light in our lives.

Lent is a season for taking inventory of our lives, of our spiritual resources. It is a good time to take out our lists again, and be reminded that we are joined to Christ. We are His people. We may not measure up completely to our own expectations, but we hold those ideals before us. We do not want the unyielding brittleness of the Pharisees. *We* want the joyful spirit symbolized by the blind man who was given his sight by Jesus.

May we be sensitive enough to discern the way of Jesus in our life, and be *bold enough* to be bearers of the light of truth, and of *saying* only *good things* to those we love and work and live with. Amen.





Chapel of St. Therese the Little Flower at Benet Academy; apse and original stained glass windows



OUR HERITAGE IN STAINED GLASS

At the Abbey, University, and Academy are to be found stained glass windows that recall the community's Czech and Benedictine heritage. Only those at the Academy are still in their original location, and even they only re-emerged after several decades of being covered. But today they all continue carry out the purpose of their makers: to proclaim God's glory, especially as manifested in the lives of His saints.



After the Abbey was officially transferred from Chicago to Lisle in 1914, work soon began on an extension of the College building to the south, an extension that would come to be known as the "Abbey side," because there lived the members of the monastic community.

At the south end of the first floor was both the choir chapel, used by the monks for the Divine Office and Conventual Mass, and the abbot's suite, which included a small chapel where the abbot could celebrate Mass privately. For these spaces there were

commissioned fourteen stained glass windows by the Chicago artist Thomas Augustin O'Shaughnessy.

In the hallway between the abbot's rooms and the choir chapel was a large window showing Christ carrying His Cross (later renovations, from the 1970s, would include this window inside an expanded chapel). The side wall had four large windows, three with scenes from the life of St. Benedict, one of the Holy Family.

Another large window, in the sacristy area, showed the monastery's patron, St. Procopius. Over the altar, were four smaller windows, representing St. Benedict, his sister St. Scholastica, and his two disciples, St. Maur and St. Placid.

The abbot's chapel also contained, over the altar, four small windows, all of Slavic saints associated with Czech history: St. Cyril, St. Methodius, St. Wenceslaus, and St. John Nepomucene.

Before these areas of what came to be called Benedictine Hall were demolished in 2004, the windows were carefully removed and, now back-lit, relocated to other spots around campus. The St. Procopius window was actually brought across College Road to the Abbey, where it now adorns the lobby area (cf earlier).

On the campus of Benedictine University, the windows are in three locations:

- the Christ Carrying the Cross window and the three connected with the life of St. Benedict are in St. Benedict's Chapel in the basement of Krasa Hall;
- the Holy Family (or "Sv. Rodina," as the Czech inscription on the window has it) is

in the atrium of the Kindlon Hall of Learning;

- the eight smaller windows are displayed along the hallways of Scholl Hall.

If eventually the University attains its hope of building a free-standing church on campus, some or all of these windows will be made a part of that structure.

The windows at the Academy are about a decade younger than those at the University. When St. Joseph Hall of what was then St. Joseph Orphanage was constructed in 1910-1911, it contained a small chapel. As the institution grew, the decision was made to expand the chapel to the north, and in 1925-1926 the room took on its present shape.



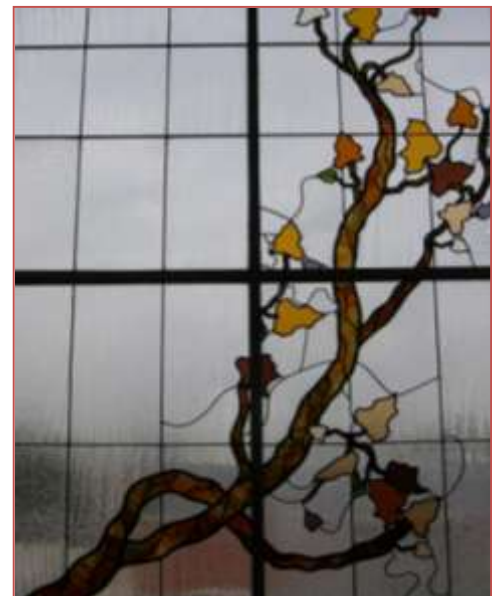
At that time, five stained glass windows were placed above the apse. One featured St. Joseph, the institution's patron, and another represented the Guardian Angels. Three others displayed Czech-related saints: Saints Cyril and Methodius, Saints Wenceslaus and Ludmila, and St. John Nepomucene.

These remained on view through the history of the Orphanage, which closed in 1956, and in the first decades after the Academy moved across Maple Avenue and began its history on its present campus. In 1975, a smaller chapel was built at Benet, and the transformation of the original chapel into a multi-purpose room included the boarding up of the stained glass windows in the apse.

When, in 2002-2003, Benet Academy restored and renovated the original chapel, under the patronage of St. Therese the Little Flower, the five stained glass windows in the apse were uncovered and have become once again a prominent feature of the worship space. New windows of a grape vine motif were added along the length of the chapel in the renovation.



Send us a note with your questions, comments, and suggestions. We'd appreciate hearing from you.



May your Lenten journey bring you to the joy of Jesus' Resurrection!

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