

By Pat Haggerty

If I asked you to do a word association for “Lent,” what might you come up with? You would probably say things like *forty days, sacrifice, Ash Wednesday, purple vestments*, *fasting, abstinence, Stations of the Cross and journey.*
There could be numerous others. In fact, there are. I did a Google search for Lenten images and came upon several Lenten wordles. A “wordle” is like a word collage with specific words used focusing on one word or theme. The words are placed horizontally and vertically in varying sizes, fonts and colors. It is a visual word splash.

It got me thinking about what Lent meant to me. I believe that thinking about Lent should be our first step on our Lenten journey. It’s a metacognitive way of putting Lent into our own frame of reality. We need not start Lent by asking, “What am I going to do for Lent? What am I going to give up?” We need to begin Lent by figuring out what it means to us.

If I created my own Lenten wordle, it would contain words and phrases like the following: *quiet, reflection, taking stock, returning to God, prayer-life, evangelization, turning inward and reaching out.*

In keeping with the emphases of my wordle, I turn to the first reading for Ash Wednesday. We are given a very specific directive about what to focus on: “Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.” (Joel 2:12-13)

It’s all about returning to God. It’s that simple---yet, that difficult. As you reflect on the words from the Book of the Prophet Joel, also think about the beautiful words of the song “Hosea” from

Weston Priory. In the first verse we sing: “Come back to me with all your heart. Don’t let fear keep us apart.”

Whatever Lent means to you, whatever words you might put in a Lenten wordle, you can’t go wrong by returning to God. In fact, you will be doing everything right!