

By Pat Haggerty

I was searching recently for a graphic to insert in a flyer for a Lenten book discussion group. So many of the images were inspiring! There were abstract crosses of numerous varieties; there were pictures of desert wastelands with tiny flowers emerging from rock crevices; and there were Lenten collages with crowns of thorns, palm branches and loaves of bread. What caught my attention, however, were the sayings that accompanied the graphics. I want to focus on three of these.

“Return to the Lord your God.” We hear this often when speaking of Lent, but what does it really mean to us? Do we really have to return? What if we have never left? We are all sinners and this is a time for us to change our ways. We need to return to the bosom of the God who loves us and rededicate ourselves to him.

On Ash Wednesday we were told, “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.” (Joel 2:12-13) Have we done that? We can always change our hearts. The hymn by Rory Cooney echoes those exact sentiments: “Change our hearts this time, your word says it can be. Change our minds this time, your life could make us free. We are the people your call set apart, Lord, this time change our hearts.” (*Spirit and Song,* 1984)

Along those same lines is the heading: “40 Days of Renewal.” Renewal, according to the American College Dictionary, means to make new again or to restore or replenish. So, if we are to experience a renewal during Lent, it means that we must humble ourselves and search for a

clean heart. In Psalm 51 we pray: “A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.”

Finally, the third quote I found was: “Don’t just give up---give more.” Have we given more this Lent? What have we done to go out of ourselves, to go out of our comfort zones, to reach out to others? Have we considered the corporal works of mercy during this Jubilee Year of Mercy? Have we practiced any of them? They give us a model for how we should treat others (USCCB). They are: feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; shelter the homeless; visit the sick; visit the prisoners; bury the dead; and give alms to the poor. How can we incorporate those acts in our lives during the remainder of Lent? It’s not too late!