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## *A Holy Lent*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
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*I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy word.* (from the Ash Wednesday service, the Book of Common Prayer, page 265).

Into a world cluttered with selfish and offensive images comes God's call to a holy Lent. On television, the popular news and information programs tell us that one movie star has shaved her hair off (I actually considered that perhaps this was a type of Lenten observance!). Another star, not really of the movies, has died pitifully and decadently leaving behind a previously deceased son, a young daughter, and a huge controversy over inheritance. The world is fascinated.

The next time you watch these images like these on television, or read about them in magazines, or talk about them over office coffee, consider to yourself how they might offer fresh definitions of some classical concepts-concepts like virtues and vices, for instance.

For their Lent, one of our Sunday morning education classes will study "the seven deadly sins." That is a wonderful topic, and I daresay they will find evidence of those sins almost everywhere these days. What are they? Pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth. The next time you become fascinated with something on television, ask yourself what exactly you are fascinated about. Is it one of those sins? It might also be one of the corresponding seven capital virtues: Humility, liberality, brotherly love, meekness, chastity, temperance, and diligence. Oftentimes, these virtues can be just as fascinating, because they are so rare!

Asking this sort of reflective question is exactly what the Church means when the Ash Wednesday minister calls us to a holy Lent, by "self-examination." In the same way that medical professionals ask us to submit to the latest cancer tests, or dentists ask us to get a check-up twice a year, the Church asks us to examine ourselves. How are we behaving these days? What are we focusing upon? What is driving our activity and obsession? I believe that fascination is really a form of meditation. What images are fascinating us? What are we really meditating upon?

For some of us the Lenten self-examination is routine. Some of us are accustomed to repenting daily; it's part of our daily prayer routine, like taking a shower to remove dirt, or like brushing our teeth. The daily repentance is not so painful when it is already a habit. For some of us, however, the self-examination might be quite painful, like flossing our teeth when we haven't done it for months. When we are out of the practice of repentance, it becomes all the more difficult.

"Repentance," by the way, means changing our mind, turning around. It means to leave one mindset or direction and to take on another mindset and direction. The Christian life, I find, is a series of course calculations and re-calculations and course re-directions. We take off on a compass setting, but then we have to go around some obstacle, take another reading, and then re-set the course.

I look forward to the humility of Lent. By "humility," I mean a more honest and "down-to-earth" attitude, for the word "humility" comes from the same root word as "dirt." On Ash Wednesday, we said, "Remember that you are but dust, and to

dust you shall return." In a way, all of us return to dust and dirt. But to be close to the earth does not necessarily mean "dirty" in a bad sense. "Humus," as every gardener knows, is good dirt; from good dirt grow the most fruitful plants.

I pray that our Lenten disciplines will prepare us to be good dirt, down-to-earth Christians ready to grow new life and love. The deeper our Lenten practice and experience, the more glorious will be that new resurrection life of Easter. So, examine your soil this Lent. Turn it over and bring fresh air into your spiritual life. In forty days, that soil will sprout the new seed of Easter.

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