

IN THE MOOD

In order for me to really get into cleaning, I have to be in the mood. When I'm in the mood, I can go at it intensively for hours. This usually happens for the big projects, like cleaning the kitchen cupboards or washing the windows, jobs that don't get done that often. After the rush of the holidays, when things settle down, I begin to notice the accumulated dirt I've overlooked for so long. I begin to feel the urge to clean it up. Lent is just such a time, set aside for us to slow down, look around in our hearts, assess conditions there, and do some things we haven't done for a while.

But "just do it!" is not the slogan for Lent. We cannot do the things we need to do during Lent without being in the mood. We can't just up and say, "I repent all my sins; I forgive all my offenders; I will turn away from sin; I will eschew oppression; I will be radically generous; I will mend all my relationships," and think it will be done. That is more akin to the hit-and-miss kind of house cleaning I too often do.

What is needed is time, quiet, reflection, pondering, all in the presence of God. We call this prayer. For many people, myself included, prayer is most often just asking God for what we want or need. It's a one-way street. Lent is the call to listen as well as talk. Is it not reasonable that, if we believe God wants a real relationship with us and wants to hear all our concerns, there might also be concerns on His heart that He wants to tell us about? If we believe praying specifically will help us recognize His answers to prayer, should we not also believe He will tell us specific things so that He can recognize our reverent response to Him?

So many times the Scripture says, "Wait for the Lord." We do not wait well in this day and age. Waiting, by definition, involves the elapse of time without activity. This is not easy to do. Our minds are so full, our schedules so over-committed. We are governed by our goals, agendas, and deadlines. These are not bad things in themselves, but too often they trump everything else. Lent is when we move these things a bit lower on the list of priorities in order to pursue greater intimacy with the Creator and Lover of our souls.

It is only as we quiet the other voices and delay the other demands that we may begin to allow God to point out to us the places in our hearts where clean-up or change is necessary. Deep cleaning of something as intricate and delicate as the human soul requires careful assessment and knowing and having the tools needed to accomplish the task. Those who restore valuable antiques spare no time, expense or effort to do the job right. Only God can direct and enable the cleansing of the human heart.

How grateful I am that He has, in fact, done this very thing. He did it once for all by sending His Son Jesus Christ. He continues to do it by having sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His people. May we give Him the pre-eminence He deserves as we take the time to quiet ourselves to listen for His voice and get in the mood.