



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

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Lent

Reflections

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Has there been a time in your life when you felt you were personally being tested – the kind of testing that looks at your character, not your physical strength or your mental prowess? Maybe this challenge came in the workplace, maybe in a personal relationship, or maybe in a moment of crisis. As you faced that challenge and you looked deep inside, were you able to see who you are and what you believe absolutely? Did your examination make you cut away the chaff in your life? Did your examination work harden what you will stand by. Did it give you the focus and energy to move forward? When you looked deep inside, was your faith at the core of your character?

Lent is the time all Catholics are called to look inward. Catholics in our faith community and in our world are being challenged today. Churches around us are closing and merging. Young adults and families don't seem to be finding spiritual nourishment at mass. Financial contributions continue to wane. Vocations to the priesthood are few, and the number of priests ordained to the Archdiocese of Chicago each year is in the single digits. Do you feel the devil's hot breath on the back of your neck? Do you wonder where God is when the future of our church seems to be in question? Like Jesus in today's reading, do you feel you are being taken to the pinnacle of the church and challenged to jump? Do you ask God in the quiet of your heart to prove he is still there? Or do you know in the quiet of your heart he is?

As we emerge from our covid cocoons, the world we see before us today is a different place. The types of jobs, the how and where you do them, are different. The cost of goods and services has risen dramatically, while investments have declined and wages have not risen proportionately. Supply chains are still missing links. We have become acutely aware of the need to dramatically slow global warming, boost technological advancements, and protect ourselves at all costs from foreign aggressors looking to capitalize on the worldwide instability the pandemic caused. Depression and anxiety plague our nation. People now live with their gaze fixed on an electronic device, causing us to be a nation starved for human connection and



community.

The influx of many cultures and religions into our society has changed the face of our nation. Christian traditions we have always counted on are no longer the anchor we can cling to in tumultuous times. We cannot assume church attendance will win out over a sporting event. We cannot assume everyone in our family will be able to get off work to celebrate religious holidays. Tithing is gone, and secular causes often receive more financial support than the church. “I’m thinking of you” has replaced “I’m praying for you.. .” Being a “spiritual person” has replaced being a “religious person.” Weddings are about “the venue,” not the sacrament if a wedding is contemplated at all. When did you last see someone bow his or her head in public and pray before consuming a meal? How many Catholics now only attend mass on Christmas and Easter or receive ashes? How do we remain relevant in a world that no longer believes there is a heaven, no longer believes the eucharist is the body and blood of Jesus, and no longer places value on life shared in a community of believers?

This is the challenge of Renew My Church. This Lent, every parishioner, not just the clergy and the renewal team, needs to look deep inside at his or her character. What do you believe about yourself and your faith absolutely? What is your God-given purpose in life, what are your gifts, and how will you fulfill your mission to bring others closer to God? We are all disciples. How will your light shine?

- Try....
- Serving the poor and vulnerable
 - Being a good steward of our planet
 - Fighting racial and gender injustice
 - Working for peace and solidarity
 - Preserving the dignity of human life
 - Fighting for the rights of workers, immigrants, and refugees
 - Strengthening families
 - Praying daily

We need your energy, strength, firmness of conviction, and abiding love to defeat the tests of the devil and bring the gospel message to each other and our world.

Director of Discipleship Formation