



THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER - USA

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

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FROM LENT TO LIFE: A PROPOSED DAILY SPIRITUAL AGENDA

As we all hear in St. Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18) on each Ash Wednesday every year, the three great works of Lent are fasting (self-denial), almsgiving (self-giving) and prayer (self-surrender to God).

As you may have heard in Ash Wednesday or Lenten homilies, these three great Lenten works have some parallel to the three great Evangelical Counsels: fasting (self-denial) to chastity; almsgiving (self-giving) to poverty; and prayer (self-surrender) to obedience (to God).

These three, whether as Lenten works or Evangelical Counsels, serve to counter the three great evils, as depicted in 1 John 2:16, that the devil, the flesh and the world offer to entice our attention and our lives away from God:

“Carnal allurements,
enticements for the eye
and the life of empty show.”

Let us unpack these three evils to see how the Lenten works or Evangelical Counsels may counter them and thus offer us Secular Franciscans a daily spiritual agenda for the rest of our lives.

First, carnal allurements may indeed be, as reads one Bible translation, “sensual lust,” but that big word “concupiscence” could easily fit here. Carnal allurements may be any desires of our fallen human flesh for something or someone not conducive to our true good, Who is God.

Thus, any form of physical excess, like lust, gluttony or drunkenness, would be here. Any form of spiritual or physical release or laziness would be here. Letting ourselves go. Not being or doing all that we could be or should do. Also any fear of suffering or sacrifice for the glory of God and the good of our sisters and brothers could fit here as well. The focus in these

allurements, this concupiscence, is on “Me, Me, Me!” at the expense of love of God or love of neighbor.

And thus, easier said than done, we counter this “Me, Me, Me!” by self-denial, self-control, chastity, even celibacy for consecrated religious.

What is penance after all but a turning from self, from sin, to God? “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel,” as my local Bishop always says when dispensing ashes on Ash Wednesday (see Mark 1:15).

Fasting from chocolate or Facebook, if chocolate or Facebook offer temptations, for 40 days during Lent might be a step in this direction, but the greatest form of fasting would be a daily, not just Lenten, struggle to fast from all sin. That might seem impossible, and so it is without God's great and daily grace, but surely the saints mastered sin most of the time, and aren't we all striving to be saints?

This first great evil from the world, the devil and the flesh, which St. John calls “carnal allurements” or “sensual lust” may be resisted by daily, not just Lenten, thoughts, words and deeds of fasting, penance, self-denial and greater self-control. This resistance is surely strengthened by God's grace obtained through the Sacraments and daily prayer. Most Catholics I know do try to practice these remedies during Lent. Why not consider practicing them every day?

Second, what evils and/or distractions might be found in “enticements for the eye”?

Well, here would be all the “bling,” the glitter, the gold, whatever or whomever money might seem able to obtain for us.

Although our big word “concupiscence” might also include greed, here is that greed for the spangles and baubles the world, the flesh or the devil might dangle before our eyes: any new material possessions when

