

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O God, my strength and my joy. Amen.

One of my favorite songs my granny sings is *Tell Me Why...*

If you are not familiar with this song, it asks the question of why... Such as why do the stars shine and why does the ivy twine... And the answer to all the questions... Is because of God... Because God made all things.

And the song ends with, because God made you, that's why I love you...

Which, as we know from life, is usually not the answer we end up at when asking, why?

For example, my niece Vinca, has always been an inquisitive kid, and like most kids, she loves to ask the question why?

A phenomenon that I am sure all you parents, grandparents, and aunts and uncles can relate to.

And, I love these conversations, especially with Vinca.

As our conversations tend to unfold with surprising twists and turns, speckled with moments of insight, of pondering, challenges, and of doubt.

Because chasing the why of things, tethers one to curiosity, reflection, and wonder. Which can lead to a deeper understanding and sometimes even, a change in perspective.

So why all this talk of why, you might be asking??? Especially since our gospel reading seems to be clearly centered around what and how...

As we just heard Jesus explain what we should be doing and how we should be going about it.

But as we all know, when it comes to Jesus, there is always a deeper understanding to be uncovered. And there is always more to be discovered...

Discovery that can envelop a lifetime.

But to honor everyone's time, let's narrow the scope to what we are called to discover during this season of Lent.

First off, let's look at how society views Lent... Most people think of lent as a time to give something up—which usually involves food.

Another Lenten practice revolves around stewardship, usually in monetary form. Like donating money or time to a specific charity or church every week in Lent.

Other common Lenten practices involve intentionality around prayer, by spending more time with God, however that might look for you...

Now these practices should sound vaguely familiar... Even if you yourself do not engage in them for Lent.

As all of these practices are brought to our attention by Jesus in our Gospel reading from today...

Jesus specifically targets 3 practices and explains how we are to engage in them.

And interestingly, these practices have traditionally become the focus of lent. That being: Giving Alms, Fasting, and Praying...

Giving Alms, translates into church and charity donations.

Fasting, is probably the most common Lenten practice, not so much as an all-out fast itself, but by giving up something specific, or eating fish on Fridays during Lent.

And prayer during Lent, is regarded as a time of intentionality, cultivating time for prayer and space for other spiritual practices.

And so, the question then becomes...Why do you engage, or not engage in these practices?

Of course, everyone's answer will be different... Which is why, searching for our why, is so important...

Because when we discover why we do things, we discover where our motivation lies, and where our heart is...

And Lent provides space for this intentionality. To engage in these practices and to be intentional around why you are doing them.

Which in turn, can deepen your relationship with God, with your neighbor, and with yourself.

Which, is what Jesus was getting at in our gospel from today...

Because these practices impact our relationship with God, neighbor, and oneself.

For example, prayer, naturally impacts your relationship with God.

Giving alms impacts how you care for your neighbor.

And fasting, reflects your relationship with yourself. But it doesn't necessarily need to be about the fast itself, or how disciplined you are, as the original point to fasting was getting your heart in the right place... By being intentional about your actions.

And so, I think the practice of fasting also includes the practice of giving yourself some grace, because sometimes your heart needs grace.

And you can deepen your relationship with yourself by giving yourself some well needed grace. After all, most people are harder on themselves than they are on others.

Indicating that Lent is a time to deepen our relationships and to uncover what we really do treasure.

By chasing your why.

Because there will come a day when you can no longer chase your why...

Which is why we start Lent with the imposition of ashes... To be reminded of our finitude, that we are but dust, and to dust we shall we return... While being marked with the cross of Christ.

The same cross we receive at baptism. A cross that embraces mystery, wonder, and awe...

Because nobody can grasp what our creator has planned for us, when we return to dust.

And later in today's service you will receive those ashes and hear those words...

Yes, as a reminder of your finitude, but also a reminder to whom you belong.

As it was Christ who became dust... for us... Reconciling all of creation in Him, so that one day we might rise in Christ...

Dust that, in turn, provide us with hope for our Lenten journey.

As Lent is not just something to get through... Haphazardly embracing one or all 3 of the Lenten practices and rushing each day towards Easter.

As these practices are important for all of life, not just during Lent.

Revealing that Lent is a time to prepare for the journey ahead, knowing that even when you mess up, falter, or fall, that God is there to meet you in the dust...

Dust that is constantly being kicked up from the dusty road of life.

Dust that is there for you to cling onto, or to cling onto you...

As dust is found in the most ordinary of places, the dirtiest of spaces, and the driest of places.

Dust is that pesky reminder... that you are not alone...

As it is dust that unites us with Christ, which answers the question why...
Why did God give his only son?

Because God so loved the world...

Turns out that the song *Tell Me Why*, had the right answer for this question too...

Because God made you, that's why God loves you...

And it is because of this love that Christ is with us. It is because of God's love that Christ journeys with us, inviting us, each day, to chase our why...
Amen.