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Becoming a lent girl

Renée Schafer Horton | Mar. 10, 2011 NCR Today

In the same way some young girls during the heyday of the Beatles identified themselves as ?Paul girls? or ?John girls,? I tend to identify myself as an Advent girl rather than a (sigh) Lent girl.

Nonetheless, Lent is upon us and I made it through Ash Wednesday on almost a complete fast -- three strawberries and a half-handful of almonds at 7 a.m. and a very small apple at 3 p.m. (Hardly seems like fasting when compared to our siblings of other faiths who fast from sunrise to sunset, but it was slightly better than the cutting-corners-allowed rules of Catholic fasts. [1])

That accomplishment under my belt, I realized late Ash Wednesday that for the first time in my life, I?m not dreading the next six weeks. I don?t think I?m a full-on Lent girl, but I?m definitely seeing this season as holding the potential for growth instead of just a long slog through misery.

I wrestle with faith (maybe I should have been named Jacob [2]) and I?ve often seen that struggle as a weakness when Lent came around, what with all the focus on repentance and turning from sin. What could be more sinful than a head full of questions and doubt? What is in need of repentance more than the habit of talking back ? passionately and with all sorts of demands ? to the Almighty?

I realized today, walking across campus with an ashen smudge on my forehead, that it just doesn?t matter if there is anything more sinful ? or if those questions and doubts are sins at all. Lent isn?t a competition, it?s an invitation. It?s a come-hither from God, if only we pay attention to noticing the Lord in everything that happens and in everyone we encounter.

The disciplines we choose (giving up food or alcohol or a bad attitude) are just triggers to remember God. Your mouth waters when you pass a bakery and instead of giving in to the craving automotan-like, you stop and say, ?No, I?m not eating that now.? In that moment, you focus on God ? who gives us the ability to grow the grain and harvest the wheat and bake the scone.

It is all about intentional living (like Intentional Discipleship [3]) and not because you?re trying to become the best Lent girl out there. Rather, you?re doing what you do when you head to the gym to exercise your muscles: You?re working out your belief muscles, which might just help make strong your mustard-seeding of faith.

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[1] http://www.americancatholic.org/features/lent/faqle9902.asp
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