



THEOLOGY CORNER

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“How Can I Remain Motivated in Lent?”

At the beginning of the Lenten season, you may have set some goals that will lead you to enter the Easter season as a new person, transformed from within by Christ. Now that we are smack dab in the middle of Lent, perhaps you are struggling to remain motivated in your Lenten practices or your goals that you have set out for yourself. Do not despair! Anytime you set out to follow Christ more deeply, the devil is always waiting to destroy your progress. Have you ever noticed that once you start making things right with God, something usually pops up seemingly out of nowhere that just throws a wrench in your plans? That’s typically a good sign of some spiritual growth happening. Remember to stay strong and keep in the faith, strengthened by your hope in the Lord, and guided by the love of Christ! As you already know, giving up things for Lent or carving out more time to do things for God involves a great deal of discipline. This process is notoriously difficult. If it wasn’t, then everyone would be disciplined! It is easy to skate by and choose the easy road, living comfortably and just remaining stagnant. Nobody remembers those kinds of people. Everything worth obtaining requires some level of struggle. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once said, “The world offers you comfort. But you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.” For better context, in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, he says that human persons are “created to be filled by God” but that our “heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined” and that “it must be stretched” in order to attain what we were created for. How can we allow for our hearts to be stretched? One thing is for sure — we can’t do it alone.

Not only is God always by your side in this Lenten journey, holding your hand along the way, but so is his Church. Make use of your parish community for accountability and support. Christ knew that we needed each other if we are to succeed in the spiritual life and this is a major reason why he established a Church. Community is an essential aspect of our Catholic faith. We should lean on each other, share our struggles, and build each other up to be prepared for the ongoing fight toward holiness. Come to Mass as much as possible, spend time praying before the Blessed Sacrament, go to confession, participate in the morning and evening prayers of the Church, pray a daily Rosary, come to the Stations of the Cross, integrate yourself into the community life of the parish. Doing all these things will provide you great strength in getting through Lent and coming out of it more Christ-like than when you came into it. Holiness is a never-ending journey while we are still on this earth. It’s not a sprint. Take each day as a new challenge, keeping track of the little wins. Did you pray more than you did yesterday? Great! Take note of those victories. Is there something that you could have done better to serve God and neighbor? Great! Take note of one or two areas and do better tomorrow. This is why the nightly examen is so helpful, for instance. Doing these small things may not seem like you are making drastic improvements, but over the course of the next few weeks, those little wins shape up to be huge developments in our life with Jesus. As Mother Teresa famously said, “Do small things with great love.”

Spend some time recognizing your weaknesses, offer them up to God, and lean on him for growth and added strength. On the other hand, take some time to recognize your own strengths, thank God for them, and ask him to use you for his glory. God made each and every one of you in his image and likeness. We should wake up every morning considering this very fact and meditate upon how we can live out this image in such a way that we manifest Christ in every aspect of our daily routine. This is what produces authentic happiness. God wants you to flourish as a human being. He gives us all we need for this to happen. We just have to remain open to the workings of the Holy Spirit so that we can become more and more like God everyday. That image of Christ that we are all called to put on is often not what you think it is. We must look to Christ crucified and become his disciple. See Christ in the suffering of the “least of these” and see Christ in your own suffering! God sanctifies our suffering so that we may be transformed by it. Let us not waste our sufferings, letting them bring about hopelessness. Instead, let us allow the grace of Christ to make them redemptive – developing and sharing in the love of Christ and rediscovering ourselves through this love, restoring an awareness of the very purpose of the Christian life — to become like God and to share the light of the Gospel with the world in word and action.