Friday After Ash Wednesday

Lenten Reflection

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Institutional Advancement

In today's Gospel Reading Jesus tells his followers that His disciples will fast once He is gone. He likened it to a wedding feast when the bridegroom is still present. But once he is gone, the guests will mourn. Or, in Jesus's case – they will fast.

Every once in a while, when I am pondering something, a song lyric will pop into my head. This time it was Joni Mitchell's Big Yellow Taxi, and the lines: "Don't it always seem to go, That you don't know what you got 'til it's gone, They paved paradise, and put up a parking lot."

It's pretty silly and seemed like a very thin analogy, but it is such a catchy tune and it just rumbled around in my brain the way catchy tunes do. When I couldn't shake it, I thought well, what do we fast for? We do not fast for what we lost. Maybe we, like Jesus's disciples fast for what remains. We fast for that parking lot.

God asks us to fast for the suffering, the hungry, and the homeless. Like so many, my Lenten fasts have evolved through the years, from the simple, inconsequential gesture of not eating sweets to a place today where I try to find one thing that I can do to make a difference for those among us who suffer.

I came to this understanding over many years, through homilies preached by Holy Cross priests and the small, but meaningful suggestions offered by Campus Ministry of ways to fast during Lent. I had likely heard it long ago, but I needed to be listening for the message to be received. I often think of one of my mother's friends, who I have always admired because when she learned of a need, she would pull her ample resources together and quietly fill that need. While I do not have the financial resources like my mother's friend, and the impact is not the same, I have learned of the great joy in making small sacrifices during Lent so that I can quietly give to others. This is one of the many ways of fasting that I hope is acceptable to the Lord.