

CHANGING OUR WAYS FOR GOOD: 1ST SUNDAY LENT B

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(Developed from a story of Paul O'Reilly S.J.)

"Repent," Jesus says, "and believe the Good News [about me]."

It's not often that a person's life is changed in a single day. A man called Chris, who lives a long way from here, has revealed that between the ages of 16 and 22, he did absolutely nothing with his life except play football, drink booze, smoke tobacco and other drugs, and chase girls - mostly without success. Every night he came home drunk. After six years of this his mother was frantic, distraught and desperate. She simply couldn't cope any longer. She spoke to her parish priest. He wasn't much help, she thought. He just suggested that Chris should go on a Day of Recollection - a kind of one day parish retreat, during which people think about their lives, their human and Christian dignity, and where they are going right or wrong.

It didn't seem like much of an idea, but she didn't have any better one. So she suggested it to Chris. He simply said, "No." She waited a while and asked him again. Again he said, "No." Then she said that she would give him \$100 if he would go. He thought about that for a while and ended up saying, "Yes."

When the day came, he went along to the group. A priest gave the group a talk. Chris found the priest boring - talking far too much and for far too long. So he didn't really listen closely. Then they all had to pray for a while. So he walked round the garden instead and smoked a cigarette. Then there was a second long and boring talk. This was followed by another cigarette as Chris walked round the garden a second time. Most of the day went on like that. But gradually, because he couldn't help it, he did start thinking about his life and where it was going.

Finally, he couldn't take it any more. He left late in the afternoon and went down to the local bottle shop. Now as he picked up his bottle to

drink, he suddenly saw a picture in his mind of his mother crying. It frightened him so much that he put down his beer without even tasting it and left. The next night he went to the same bottle shop. He picked up a beer and the same thing happened. Once more the picture came to him of his mother crying. So again he was too anxious and too frightened to drink. The next night, he went to a different bottle-shop. But still the same thing happened – once again he imagined his mother at home crying.

From that day to this, Chris has never drunk alcohol. And now he looks back on the suffering he caused his family and it makes him cry. But his mother says it's the best \$100 she ever spent.

That, I think, is the authentic spirit of Lent. It's a time when we stop and consider our lives in the light of God's Word. We consider especially how we must become better people if we are to become the people that God created us to be.

What are the ways that God needs us to develop if we are to belong more closely to God and be good citizens of his Kingdom? What is it both inside us and around us that is stopping us from becoming more authentic and better people and living more productive lives? What are the ways that those who love us most need us to change, if we are to become better husbands or wives, better brothers or sisters, better sons or daughters?

We can find the answers to those questions in the grace that God gives us throughout Lent. St Paul has said that, "*faith comes from hearing*" (Romans 10:17). So, as Lent unfolds, let us pay special attention to what God will say to us in the good news of the Scriptures and especially in the good news about the great person of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Then we will be able to say sincerely with the Psalmist today: "*Lord ... make me walk in your truth, and teach me: for you are God my Saviour*" (Psalm 25:5).

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