

2 Lent A – Fr. Val Handwerker

March 12, 2017

Cathedral

8:00 and Noon

Theme: He saved us. It's all gift, and we live a holy life in gratitude for our salvation.

In these first days of our Lent, as I checked into the Downtown Y to exercise, the receptionist Spencer asked me: “Father Val, what did you give up for Lent?”

I paused for a moment. I answered Spencer that I couldn't tell him. Every Ash Wednesday, I explained, we hear the Gospel in which Jesus teaches us that, when we fast, pray, and do almsgiving, we don't let **“our left hand know what our right hand is doing”** (Matthew 6:3). I told him I teach our students in school to keep what they do extra, or what they give up, during Lent to themselves.

Friends: we've got to hear how St. Paul teaches us this morning: In Christ Jesus **“God saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works, but according to his own design...”** It's so clear: Not because of *our* good works did Jesus save us. It's not a point system, in which we give up stuff, trying to live virtuously and avoid wrongdoing, in order to add up points to our credit. We hope to have enough points to offset those inevitable deficits—sins—which go on our scorecard. At heaven's gate after our earthly life, we want to make our best case that's possible. Some of us see it as our final performance review, with the hunch that we earn heaven.

“God saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works...” so the Apostle Paul stresses this Lenten Sunday. Salvation is never a reward; it's not based on a point system. Sisters and brothers: It's always a free gift, given us through the blood of the Crucified Christ.

In front of the baptismal font is the “Book of the Elect.” Last Sunday all those throughout West Tennessee who will be baptized on the holiest night of the church's year, the Great Easter Vigil, came here to the Cathedral. It was done similarly in every cathedral throughout the world. Here Bishop Holley “elected”

them, chose them for their coming baptism, and they signed their name to this “Book of the Elect.”

You see, Lent is always headed toward baptism—for the Elect, and for all of us as we are renewed in our baptismal consecration on Easter Sunday. And right after the Elect are baptized this Easter, the Bishop will say these words (just as they were said whenever each of us was baptized): **“You have been enlightened by Christ. Walk always as children of light.”**

Just as in that moment of his Transfiguration Jesus shown in the brilliant light of his coming glory...yes, we have been enlightened by Christ. *He* has saved us. It’s a gift, always a gift. Then, in gratitude we’re called to live “a holy life,” a just life.

The other night I was in my car, and Father Jose Cruz walked by and remarked how my headlights shone so much brighter. A month ago, for my yearly maintenance of the car, they told me that, after a dozen years, I needed to get my headlights cleaned. *That*, Friends, is why during Lent we do extra—fasting by sharing our bread with the hungry, working to freeing the oppressed. Yes, we try to clear away, and purify, all that keeps us from truly living as **“children of light.”** We strip away all that keeps us from reflecting the light of the transfigured Christ in our own daily lives.

Yes, *he* saved us, and not because of our good works! We gather this Sunday for Eucharist—that is, to give thanks. We do so not only here. Actually, as we are renewed in the Flesh and Blood of the Risen Jesus, our whole lives are to be lived in gratitude for the love Jesus has shown us. In gratitude—always, in *gratitude*—we’re called to allow our light shine ever more clearly!

Indeed, he saved us. And we’re called to live, as St. Paul calls us, **“a holy life”** in gratitude for the gift of this salvation. By grace, may our light shine brightly!