

A Glimpse of My Heart
By: Fr. Thomas James, S.V.D.

In a brief heart landscape survey, I realized and observed at this particular time, we are in the process of trying to vaccinate America, eradicate the virus pandemic, but now we have discovered we have various strains from the original virus; simultaneously we also are celebrating Black History Month, and Lent. Coupled with this, I have also noticed that some are trying to destroy the soul of America, trying to dismantle one of our most basic premise, “One Nation under God”,; others are also trying to destroy “the soul of God’s Word” removing Him from our hearts and experience. The Old Negro Spiritual reminds us, “Through it all, through it all, we have learned and some are presently learning to depend and trust in God”!

In our readings for the Second Sunday of Lent we are tested like Abraham and but also challenged by Our Heavenly Father to listen to His beloved Son. Abraham responded to his test with steadfast and unwavering faith! In looking at the faith in my heart, sometimes shaken but always remembering faith is a gift given to me to believe that he will be my rock, my refuge and salvation. Often I think of St. Thomas, the miracles were before him and he still struggled; now I realize the miracles are before me. In looking at the courage of our elders, the courage to believe that the Lord would be with them when they sang, “Precious Lord take my hand and lead me on”... this is what the announcement of the Angel did for Abraham, the holocaust was provided for him in the place of his son, Isaac! In the Alleluia verse, we are challenged by Our Almighty Father to listen to His Son.

On Ash Wednesday, the challenging messages was “If today you hear his voice, harden not your Heart”! With the Virus, Black History Month and the Season of Lent we have many challenges that lie before us that could easily harden our hearts. Yet the prophet Joel announces to all of us return our whole heart to the Lord. With all the deaths from the virus, the sufferings, the hardships we are called to keep our hearts open; in terms of Black History, we have injustices, violence, unemployment, violence, racism, and poverty, some structures that support systemic racism and the silence of “church leadership” in silence. Lent is one of the most special seasons of the church; Each one of us are called to make changes in our lives and become better persons in relationship with our God, our neighbor and ourselves. Sometimes my heart seems burdened then I pause for a moment, realizing and remembering what St. Paul was told, “My Grace is sufficient for you”! Now I realize if I keep my heart open, and do what is prescribed in Mathew’s Gospel on Ash Wednesday: be generous and grateful, be prayerful and make sacrifices that will change the quality of my spiritual outlook and life; His grace gives both you and me the strength we need to continue because He is present with all of us. Those three spiritual insights shared by St. Mathew are challenging and sometimes take me out of my comfort zone. When I reach that point, I can hear the Lord, listening; I continue to respond and make those changes in my life that keep me engaged in goodness. That I hope and pray that I produce daily in my life and I think many others may feel the same way.

This Lent my heart is proposing to all of us and asking all of us to add another element to our first Lenten resolution, (penance) by attaching a spiritual resolution to it. Now we have a dual approach to our Lent, physical and spiritual. That which we give up is usually physical or external; now we can add a spiritual call from God’s Word; choosing a spiritual challenge that can be a lifetime gift that is the foundation of our spiritual journey of faith; a few suggestions are outlined below. Our physical resolutions are usually for forty days then it is over but hopefully our spiritual commitment this Lent will be for all of us a spiritual experience of change for continual spiritual development and growth for a lifetime. At the beginning of this Lent with open hearts we heard Our Savior and now let us listen to Him and see which one of these spiritual challenges below touches your heart as we listen; you can apply the virus, black history and Lent to each one and any one of them.

- 1) If you want to become my disciple take up your cross and follow me!
- 2) If today you hear his voice, harden not your heart!
- 3) Remain in me and I in you, if not you will wither !
- 4) All you who labor and burdened come to me I will give you rest.

- 5) My yoke is easy and my burden light.
- 6) I pray for them who believe in me because of the Word you have preached.
- 7) My grace is sufficient for thee.
- 8) Make me an instrument of Justice
- 9) Make me an instrument of Peace
- 10) Make me an instrument of Compassion

Today one of the core gifts of our liturgical service today is courage, the courage to respond to the challenges that we face whether the Corona Virus is, the issues of injustices in Our Country and making our Lent a Spiritual changing Enriching Experience. Our Elders made Courage a core of their lives; we experience that in the poems and songs of the Old Negro Spirituals. During this time in our history let us all wear and live the badge Courage. Pick one of the Spirituals and make it a daily prayer, throughout the Lenten Season!