

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination, and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. (BCP p. 265)

Dear Friends in Christ,

These words above contain the invitation made at the beginning of each Lent, the season of the Church year which begins this Wednesday, February 18. I have heard and read these words for over 30 years and each time I encounter them I am struck by the depth of this invitation.

I suspect that when most of us think of Lent we think primarily of self-denial. The idea of giving up something for Lent was part of the Christian formation of many of us early in our lives. Some years later it became fashionable not to talk so much about giving up something for Lent but taking something on such as bible study or a service project. All of these are good things when they are done out of love and gratitude for what God has done for us. Remember God's favor is unmerited, undeserved, and unearned. God loves us just because we are. We love because God first loved us.

What leapt out at me as I read the invitation this year was the invitation to prayer. The invitation to prayer comes before the invitation to fasting and self-denial. This reminds me that prayer is primary—fasting and self-denial flow from prayer, our conversation with God. As I read these words, the words of the hymn from my childhood came to mind.

*What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear,
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer*

Prayer is a privilege given to us by a loving God inviting us to share with the one we love who loves us all that is on our hearts and minds. While it is true that God knows our needs, wants, desires, frustrations, hurts, and joys, it is the act of conscious intentional prayer that makes God's love a reality for me. I know in my own life that when I don't make time for deep personal prayer my relationship with God and therefore others is not quite right.

As your bishop I am encouraging you to make prayer the center of your Lenten observance this year. Set aside a time each day to pray, offer each day to God, take a moment to simply enjoying God's presence, say thank you to God for the blessings in your life, acknowledge your faults, and let God know your needs and those of others (see BCP p.856-857). Don't worry about how you pray, just pray every day following this guideline and I am certain you will truly have a holy Lent.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. A. Miller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "M".

The Rt. Rev. Steven A. Miller
Bishop of Milwaukee