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Spring

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Spring

Most of us associate the season of spring with fresh growth in plants, and the period of time that follows winter when the days grow apparently longer and brighter in the northern hemisphere. Some do not readily associate this pleasing association of spring with the liturgical season of Lent. But the root meaning of the word "Lent" means spring, with its characteristics of increased light and of new life. Lent, for those who reflect, is like the season of spring, offering the movement from winter to the fullness of summer. Lent is a time for shifting from interior darkness to light, from orientation toward death to that of life.

We experience the benefits of spring differently depending upon our geographical location. Though weather patterns may be rather predictable, they are not directly attendant upon changes in a calendar. So too, the gains received from Lent are not at all the same for the many and varied groups of people across the world who attend to the season. Though the inexorable movement of time as expressed in a calendar, and the often unpredictable vagaries of local weather that mark the season of spring are completely outside our control, all of us have the potential for greatly affecting our experiences of Lent by the attitude we take towards it.

Gratitude is always within our capabilities, and is a most effective means for making the season of Lent a time of positive growth like that which spring sunshine and water provide for the growth of flowers, trees and crops. Plants do not develop by their own power, but respond to the sun and rain. Nor do we of ourselves initiate the joy and peace that accompanies loving service to others. Rather, the spiritual exercise of conscious gratitude opens our hearts to growth that is as natural as when plants receive the right amount of water and sunshine.

For many of us, Lent means a time when we engage in various traditional personal and communal practices that have been handed on to us as appropriate preparations for the celebration of Easter. Into any and all of these we can include an element of gratitude or we can add gratitude as a very effective accompaniment to whatever we do during Lent.

For example, if we choose to "give up" something for Lent as a sign of our commitment to strengthening our inner lives, we can also make it a regular practice to "add up" the blessings we have, including such non-material things as, for example, our desires for becoming more loving persons. By watering the God-inspired movements within us, and bringing them to active consciousness, we will grow towards the Light, and find encouragement for continued trust in God.

For those of us who give additional time to reflection and prayer during Lent, we can easily include at least one brief deliberate look at the experiences of our day, and find causes for gratitude. There is much about spring and Lent for which we can be thankful: everything from the gifts that are present in all of creation to every interior movement of trust, hope or love. We can consider, if we wish, all our faults and failings with the intention of improving our behavior. But taking notice of even the small ways that we have been graced to live up to our ideals, gives us immediate and specific encouragement to continue growing towards the Light.

Spring and Lent: a time for gratitude that brings forth light and new life within us.