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Winter to Spring, Lent to Easter

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Winter to Spring, Lent to Easter

Even in Southern California, spring is visibly preceded by winter, when at least some of the trees lose their leaves and look almost dead for a time, and in spring are covered by the beginnings of new leaves. Some flowers are in bloom no matter what time of year it is, but those who grow fruit and vegetables know what will or will not grow through the winter months. All of us experience the difference between long dark evenings of winter and then the increased hours of daylight that we receive as we move into spring.

Lent ends with Easter in Christian calendars, but Lent, in its root meaning, refers to the solar calendar, and the increased sunlight that is so noticeable with the coming of the vernal equinox. If we did not know the connection between Lent and the increasing hours of daylight, most of us would still appreciate the difference in feelings associated with Lent and Easter. We might prefer the light of Easter to the dark of Lent, but just as some plants need the season of winter in order to bring forth new life in spring, joy does not exist for us without a context of challenges and suffering.

We know sadness in our own lives, and are very much aware of great sorrows of injustice, illness, and suffering in the world about us. None of these experiences are causes for joy. But every time we win even a small victory over a physical, mental, or spiritual obstacle, a smile opens in our hearts, and we are touched by joy. Some of us might live a generally peaceful life, but we notice joy most frequently when we, or anyone we know even remotely, overcomes some form of darkness, no matter for how brief a period of time, or how small the triumph might appear to be in someone else's eyes.

Easter is not the defeat of Lent, but represents the conquest of the various forms of darkness that threaten or deaden our hearts. Lent is a positive time for coming to terms with one of more of the dark aspects of our lives, whether they are of our own initiation or of others. Easter illumination is brighter and more joyful for us to the degree that, during Lent, we have reflected on the challenges to life that exist within us and about us.

Easter is as personal for us as we are willing to admit. All of the decisions we make, all of our accomplishments and changes of attitude that elicit joy are not "things," but experiences, and are as spiritual as is love. Many of our experiences of life that move from a sense of winter into that of spring are implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, expressions of our companionship with Jesus Christ, who was as dead as a tree that has been uprooted from the ground, but is more alive now than we and all the rest of creation.

In terms of our relationship with God, Lent like winter, is temporary, but Easter is spring forever.