

Now if you've only seen the movie version of the story, you missed the episode I'm going to tell you about. Apparently the miracle God worked in Lloyd LeBlanc exceeded even Hollywood's special effects, so listen up people.

On the night of the murder the police brought Lloyd LeBlanc to the crime scene to identify his son's body. And there in the cane field, he knelt beside his dead boy - "his two little eyes sticking out like bullets" - he later recalled. And he prayed the prayer years of unselfing had taught him to pray in any situation, The Lord's Prayer.

And when he got to "*forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,*" he neither halted not hated but simply cried out, "*Whoever did this, I forgive them.*"

And he meant it. And he still means it today. And he keeps on practicing the "fast" that leads to unselfing so that he may continue to grow in his life with God, in the church, and for the world.

And that, sisters and brothers, is "*to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist!*"

And that is what Lent is all about! Have a good one!!

Amen!! Thanks be to God!!

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A Message from Mark!

Unselfing – A Lenten Agenda

17 February 2010 - Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2,12-17; II Cor 5:20-6:10; Matt 6:1-6; 16-21

We are called to be a **witness** to the power of God at work in our lives. In his book, Growth or Decline, Catholic Cardinal Suhard wrote: "*To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist.*"

"To live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist." There's a Lenten agenda worth pondering!

"To live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist." A profound and important challenge!

"To live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist." A complex and difficult change!

Particularly complex, profound, and difficult in a culture such as ours. For a life lived that would not make sense unless God exists is a life lived for others. An **"unselfed" life**. A life with a different sense of gravity than that which rules most of those around us. In a culture that teaches us to live with ourselves, in ourselves, and for ourselves, God rudely intrudes, insisting that life as he meant for us to live it is a life lived with him, in the church, and for the world.

With God, in the church, and for the world - that's really just another way of restating the ancient promise God made to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12. There God told our two forebears that God would have through them a great people; that God would bless that people, and that through that people God would spread God's blessings all over creation.

In short, through old Abe and Sarah God would get a people, bless them, and make them a blessing for everyone else. Get the connections? God makes us a people, hence our life is lived with him. God blesses us as a people, hence life is to be lived in the church. And God blesses others through us, hence life is lived for the world; a life whose center and heart is God and whose longitude and latitude are the church and the world. A more powerful alternative to our culture's vision of life can scarcely be imagined!

Getting a people, blessing them, and making them a blessing for others - that's God's agenda, friends. That's what God is up to in our world. That is his will for us and his way with us. And that's why I entitled this sermon *“Unselfing: A Lenten Agenda.”*

“Unselfing” is freedom from the little “Me, Myself, and I” universes most of us live in most of the time. “Unselfing” is also freedom for, freedom to be for God - living life with him, in the church, and for the world. And such “unselfing” is what Lent is all about!

It's what the whole Christian life is mostly about too. But early on, discerning Christians in the ancient church realised that even though we struggle with unselfing all the time, unless specific periods were set aside to focus on it, we would never really face up to it or successfully struggle against it. So they set apart a longer and shorter period of time in the church year for just such recognition and struggle with “unselfing.” The longer period is the one we enter tonight - Lent. The shorter period we call Advent, prepares us for Christmas.

Let's summarise: God's plan is for us to live with God, in the church, and for the world. That requires of us a radical “unselfing” in a powerfully selfish culture. Lent is that period of time we focus on our resistance to God and open ourselves to God's “unselfing” surgery in our lives.

And that divine surgery aims to open us up to those around us - friend, acquaintance, and, yes, even enemy. It requires a “fasting” of us, just like the prophet Joel announced.

A fasting from what keeps us from God, a fasting from what keeps us from each other, and a fasting from what keeps us from reaching out and serving the world.

What might such a "fast" look like for us here in the 21st century? I offer you a list of ten things we Christians can "fast" from this Lent, each of which will open us up in new and different ways to God, the church, and the world.

Let us then this Lent:

- 1 fast from judging others, focusing on them instead as those who also bear God's image
- 2 fast from fear, focusing instead on the healing power of God
- 3 fast from gossip, focusing instead on speech seasoned with grace and mercy
- 4 fast from cynicism, focusing instead on gratitude
- 5 fast from anger, focusing instead on patience
- 6 fast from pessimism, focusing instead on hope
- 7 fast from negatives, focusing instead on affirmations
- 8 fast from self-concern, focusing instead on compassion
- 9 fast from suspicion, focusing instead on the truth
- 10 fast from worry, focusing instead on prayer and faith

Such a fast, should we undertake it or any part of it, will change our lives and our church in ways we cannot now predict or imagine. Let me share with you one man's story, a man shaped by the type of fast I've just outlined. His is certainly an extreme story, but I tell it on the assumption that if God can shape a human life to respond to the most difficult situations like this man, God certainly can be trusted to similarly shape us in the less severe and difficult situations we face.

Lloyd LeBlanc is the father of the boy brutally killed by Patrick Sonnier in Louisiana in 1977. Sonnier was the death-row inmate ministered to and advocated for by Sister Helen Prejean, who recounted the whole matter in her book *‘Dead Man Walking’*.