

# Open my eyes to what's important

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Created Feb 17, 2010

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<http://ncronline.org>)

Imagine you are an archbishop going for a walk in a spacious cemetery. It's a chilly Lenten day. You're weary from a long day's work, and haven't even taken time to get out of your work clothes because of yet another meeting in the evening. Soon after you settle into a comfortable pace, a poorly dressed man walks in your direction. As he draws close to you, he stops. The next thing you know he's thrusting a knife at your neck, demanding "money or your life."

Your billfold's at home. There's no money to give. The assailant keeps insisting. Frightened out of your wits, you remember you stuck a snack in your pocket. You point to the candy bar and tell him it's all you've got -- he can have it. At this suggestion, the man looks at you in utter disbelief and protests, "No way, Father. I don't eat chocolate during Lent."

I heard this story long ago about the late Archbishop Gerald Bergan of Omaha, Neb. I laughed heartily at its incongruity. But I also got the point, realizing in an instant how absurd my Lenten penances were: not eating candy, fasting to lose weight, giving up coffee, liquor or TV. Had these practices changed my attitudes and behavior? Not one iota. None of these had value in themselves when it came to spiritual renewal. Mostly they fed my hungry ego, so at Easter I felt proud satisfaction about my efforts at discipline.

Discipline and disciple have the same Latin root, *discipulus*, meaning "a learner." Webster's Dictionary defines discipline as "training that develops self-control, character, or orderliness and efficiency." Discipline for the sake of discipline creates disciplinarians but doesn't do much for changing one's heart. Worthy Lenten restraint is practiced for the purpose of learning, of discovering what attitudes and behavior are to be changed in order to reflect the teachings of Christ.

For instance, we can discipline ourselves to keep quiet instead of having to be right, to not verbally slap back in response to hurtful remarks, to stop trying to show how wise we are. Closing our mouth is not enough, though. There also needs to be an opening of the barriers in our heart.

Lent most often is referred to as "a time of renewal." I prefer "a period of recovery." In *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*, Eckhart Tolle emphasizes: "You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is already within you, and allowing that goodness to emerge. But it can only emerge if something fundamental changes in your state of consciousness." Lent offers the opportunity to recover that goodness, to allow it to surface in thought, word and action.

Our state of consciousness gets blurred by the incredible pace of life as we hurry through days with packed schedules and pressures of our own or others' expectations. "Open my eyes to what is really important, all those delicate movements of your presence that go unnoticed by me," writes the mystic Evelyn Underhill. In other words, help me recover kindness, generosity,

forgiveness, patience, understanding and other innate gifts of mine that get buried in constant family and work responsibilities. Guide me in sorting through the debris of self-preoccupation and cultural duplicity.

One of the most valuable Lenten disciplines involves a resurgence of faithfulness to daily prayer. As we quiet our mind and heart, we recover a state of consciousness in which we are once again aware of being united with the Holy One. This inward attention enables us to identify those hidden qualities of goodness that have gone astray. We learn again who we are, why we are, and restore what is of most value to our life.

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**Prayer action suggestion:**

Name your Lenten disciplines. How will they change your life?