

ASH WEDNESDAY 2011

In the 80's and 90's there was a daily comic strip in the newspapers, which I loved a lot and have missed ever since it stopped running.

It was called "The Far Side" by Gary Larson, and one of his favorite subjects was hell.

Among my favorite Far Side comics was one which was set at the entrance to hell, set in a cave with flames sparking up here and there, with a demon sitting at a desk at the entrance and a long line of glum looking, doomed sinners, waiting to be checked in.

But the thing I loved about it was that, hanging attractively on the wall just behind the desk, where all those arriving could see it, was a framed picture with the inspirational words: "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." Think about that for a second.

No, that is not an introduction to a hell fire and brimstone sermon, but as I reflected on Ash Wednesday and Lent these last few days I thought of that saying, which then reminded me of that comic.

The reason I thought of that saying was because Ash Wednesday gives us a chance to say: "Today is the first day of the rest of my spiritual life." In a world where our lives are so busy, where we are rarely if ever given the space to work on our spiritual lives, Ash Wednesday gives us an opportunity to hit the reset button on our spiritual lives and devote the next 40 days to reclaim our lives in Christ.

And it doesn't have to be complicated, but it will take considerably more than giving up sweets. I'm going to suggest that you keep your chocolates and work on one or more of the following areas to strengthen yourself as a Christian.

1st, read scripture. Take a gospel and read a little bit each day. Mark is only 16 chapters. Read a half chapter each day and you will have taken it in with days to spare.

2nd, pray. Everyday certainly and 3 times a day as a goal. Keep it simple by starting with the Lord's Prayer, then give thanks for your blessings, then pray for particular needs. Pray when you rise, once during the day, and then at the end of the day.

3rd, serve. There is always a danger that we become so focused on ourselves and those in our immediate circle that we forget that we are called to serve others in need. Help out at the Ardmore Food Pantry; our next week with the Interfaith Hospitality Network is Holy Week. The purpose for getting our own spiritual house in order is so that we can more effectively serve God by serving others.

4th, attend worship every Sunday, if you are not working, either here or wherever you are. Christians are supposed to do that any way, but more and more people are doing so less and less.

Now, I know 4 areas of spiritual discipline sounds like a lot, so if it does to you, pick one or two and work on them. But by my reckoning, doing all four still only amounts to about an hour a day, if that. But I assure you that, hitting your

reset button by making room for God and your neighbor will have a positive effect. Read, Pray, Serve, Worship.

Today is the first day of the rest of your spiritual life.

Amen.