

Lenten Reflection by Margaret Mary Liang, OSB

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When it comes to Lent, I have always felt inadequate. I begin Lent with great expectations and soon “life takes over” and things become a blur. Most of the times, when the 40 days are over I often feel like I am FINALLY ready to begin the real race and to GIVE IT MY ALL.

This year, like all the other years, I looked at the reflection paper given to us and resolved to make this Lent a little different. I wanted to find the joy in going through this penitential period. That was my project: Finding my joy in Lent. Prayer, fasting, sacrifice and almsgiving are all good but where is the JOY?

Not too long ago, Sr. Lynn Marie and I have talked about Marie Kondo, the Japanese queen of organizing and decluttering. Since 2014, Marie Kondo has become a household name worldwide for those who tend to hoard stuff: nice stuff, mediocre stuff, or just stuff. I even bought her book that was a New York Times best seller. What made her way of de-cluttering a major success? I have tried her formula and it worked! I just need to do it more often.

The formula to organizing and decluttering according to Marie Kondo is to ask one basic question: Does this item, knick-knack, or whatever, spark joy? The answer is either a yes or a no. If yes, it stays in the room. If no, then it is set aside. She then has a way to help you pass those items on to a worthy user. If we are honest with that one question, what a delight and pleasure it would be to be surrounded with things in your room that only sparked joy.

Does Lent spark joy for me? Despite knowing I would keep Lent regardless of the answer, I went searching. I Googled “JOY DURING LENT” and found a LifeTeen blog entry entitled, “When Lent Feels Joy-Less: 7 Tips to make it Joyful.” One of the tips that perked my interest was to CHALLENGE YOURSELF. It appealed to me because it called me to step out of my comfort zone and to experience something new. For me that challenge is as simple as sitting quietly during the day and observing how the day has unfolded not as I expected, but in spite of that, and it all worked out for the good. That is marvelous, that God can make things good in spite of my clumsiness. What more would God accomplish if I let Him take the lead? All those infinite possibilities lie ahead of me. How gracious is our God, and how much more do I want to rely more on him and how much joy and relief, knowing that I do not have to have all the answers in advance. God indeed is gracious!!

So that is my challenge to you: How can Lent spark joy for you? What do you need to do to step out of your comfort zone? Choose a project, and after you have completed it rejoice that, with God’s help, you accomplished something that you didn’t think that you could. With joy and exhilaration, may you have an even greater desire to please God each day.

**MAY THIS LENT BE A TIME OF SURPRISE AND JOY FOR ALL OF US!!**