On this first Sunday of Lent I wanted to share with you a little about the Lent history experience. “Lent” comes from the Saxon word lenctentid, which is used for the month of March and sometimes signifying spring time and the lengthening of days. Today I thought I would focus on the concept of fasting before Easter. Believe it or not fasting was a practice way before Christianity. But it reached the Saxons in the first century of the church. It was a very brief process of only a few days. So how did the practice go from a few days to forty days? Well, the earliest known reference to a forty day fast was in 325 AD. This practice came out of a conversation at the council of Nicea where the church leaders met to discuss understandings of whom and what they believed in. As a result it became a regular practice that for forty days people enjoyed only one meal a day which did not include meat or fish. Therefore, forty days is in memory of Christ’s time of fasting in the wilderness. It should probably be noted that Christ never commanded His followers to fast. But fasting was clearly a custom in His time. And He even made the comment “when you fast…” (Matthew 6:16).

What’s really interesting about this practice in the early church is that it seemed to be a prerequisite for baptism which happened once a year at Easter. It seems that Lent was instituted as a preparation for baptism. There is reason to believe that this was a huge event for both baptism and renewal of a baptismal covenant.

Just to be really specific, Christ’s fast in the wilderness had a huge purpose. It was a preparation for a major transformation in His life. He would begin His ministry after His time in the wilderness. His ministry would change the world forever.

Our Lord had an interesting practice and that is that when He asked His disciples to “give anything up”, it was in order to let go of an old direction and embrace a new direction in their lives. One could say that Lent originated with the intent of teaching people how to give something up as a prerequisite for a major transformational moment. Something to pray about.

Blessings

Stephen