

MARCH 3, 2026 FATHER JOHN BERTAIO

Here we are, almost halfway through Lent. How are you doing with some of the promises, perhaps, that you made? Or did you make any promises, such as maybe eating properly, pray just a little bit more, attending Mass, especially on Fridays, and staying for the stations of the cross?

Again, I'll talk about my dad and my mom, but specifically today, it brings great thoughts, memories of my dad. You see, during Lent he made it a point to attend daily Mass on his way home from work. He worked the night shift. And he always came home expressing his joy for having gone to Mass. Although he was very tired, his spirit was very much alive. He was always, always focused on God. And on doing his will. Especially at this time of the year.

Yet he never mentioned that when he got home, to Mom and myself and my brother, he would never mention to us that we should attend Mass, or we should go to Mass. He left it totally up to us. Our compromise then was to go to Mass on Fridays, and of course always attend the stations of the cross.

We're back to the Gospel. In today's Gospel, we learned that the religious leaders wanted to be seen by others, and how good they were. The prophet Isaiah warned both the rulers and the people of Sodom and Gomorah to humbly listen and submit to God's teaching, so that they could learn to do good, and to cease from doing evil.

Jesus warned the scribes and the Pharisees to teach and serve the people with humility and sincerity, rather than with pride and self-righteousness promotion. They went to great lengths to their religious status and practices. In a way, they wanted to be good models of the observant

Jewish laws, and of course to the Jewish people who were watching them. This was in, and I quote: "Proclaiming to see how well we observe all the ritual and regulations of our religion." End quote. From one of these scribes.

In their misguided zeal, their religion that they sought recognizing an honour for themselves rather than for God. But for themselves. They made the practice of their faith a burden rather than a joy for the people that they were supposed to be serving. Not very good examples.

In fact, the true respect for God inclines us to humble ourselves, and to submit to his wisdom and guidance. We cannot be taught by God unless we first listen, stop, listen to his word, and obey his instructions.

"Call no one father," have you heard that before? "Call no one father." Because, uh—Why? Jesus again tells us to stop calling others rabbi. The Jewish title—this is a Jewish title for God's word, or father. The law of Moses in scripture specifically instructed all fathers to be teachers and instructors for their children, to help them understand and obey God's instruction.

So why did Jesus rebuke the scribes and the Pharisees, the religious authorities of the Jewish people? Because, in the presence of his disciples, they wanted to be above and beyond everyone else. See, Jesus—they wanted to warn both of his own disciples and the religious leaders about the temptation to seek honours and titles that drew attention to ourselves—to themselves, in place of God. So it's about me, not God. No, no, no. It's about God, not me.

For example: Pride. You've heard of that word. Pride. It tempts us to put ourselves first above others. The Gospels warned "the dangers of the self-sick in pride," for example: "Pride goes before destruction, and a

proud spirit before the fall," as we read in the letters of James, and of course in Proverbs as well.

So how about then the other side? Humility. "Respect for God and for his ways inclines us to be humble, and to simplify" to be as simple, simplicity, humble, and honest of heart. "The willing readiness to seek the one true God who is God alone himself."

On the same topic, what is the nature of true humility, and why should we embrace it as essential for ourselves, and for our lives? You see, we can easily mistake humility for something demeaning. "Oh, I'm not good enough)" Or harmful to ourselves, our sense of well-being, and feeling belittled. Belittling ourselves and being humble. That's not quite what we have in mind.

In fact, true humility is not feeling bad about one's self, or having a low self opinion of self, of thinking of yourself as inferior to others. No, that's not it. True humility frees us from preoccupation with ourselves, or as a low self-esteem, it tends to focus on our attention on ourselves.

Humility then is truth in self-understanding and truth in action. Viewing ourselves honestly and with sober judgement means seeing ourself as God sees us. Really key. How does God see ourselves, inside of all? Not outside, but inside.

So then in closing, the question is—for Lent—is whether we translate our faith into visible behaviour. What's inside, what comes out. Are we more compassionate? Are we more willing to listen? More patient with others?

Here, at our Eucharistic celebration, we are disciples, equal disciples of the Lord. Humble, honest, sincere, prayerful, and focused on him.

And I quote from one of my sources that states: "After the Mass, you may want to turn off the television," as a suggestion, "and then to any other source of distraction after this Mass, and think about this: 'Have you become an apostle, a follower of Christ, although in a different way, from the original 12?'" A special disciple, a special apostle.

People will not see what's inside, but people want to see Christ, and you could be Christ to others. Who do they see when they look at you? Is it your face, or the expression? Do they see a reflection of Jesus Christ in you? Not over the hill, not under the hill, but a simple, honest, sincere person.

How? I could give you an example, but I'll let you think of one for yourself, on how you could be honest, sincere, and to be Christ to others.

And so, let me close with a prayer.

Lord Jesus, you became a servant for my sake, to set me free from tyranny and selfish pride, and self-concern. Teach me to be humble, as you are humble, and to love others generously, with selfless service and kindness. Amen.