14 February 2016 – The First Sunday of Lent

Hearts and flowers and Valentines – and <u>Lent</u>?

What have they got to do with each other? Quite a bit, actually.

The heart is the symbol of the life of striving, of feeling and passion, of conviction. Our language reveals the importance of this symbol: We speak of a heart being touched, or a heart being moved; we can have a change of heart, store memories in the heart, communicate heart to heart. Hearts can be given; hearts can be stolen; hearts can be broken. Each of these speaks of an event that can touch our depths, change our hearts and thus, our lives. And what is central in Christianity is a change of heart.

However, we have an unfortunate tendency to become hard-hearted, as a result of the times that we have been hurt, when our hearts have been broken. Our response to those experiences is to build walls, tall and strong, around the heart, so that we will not be hurt again, so that nothing unpredictable can touch and move the heart from outside the defended boundary of its stronghold. Walls keep other people out, but walls also keep us in, alone and isolated. And the walls we build are even capable of keeping God out. But there is hope, even for human hardheartedness.

God's promise:

> *I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you.... You shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:25-28).*

Especially during this season of Lent, Jesus is calling us, above all, to a *metanoia*, a change of heart – because if the heart is changed, then everything else (ideas, behavior, attitudes) also changes. But if the heart is <u>not</u> changed, then whatever change we accomplish in other areas of life really does not matter.

Lent has begun.
The goal of this season is not a change of diet,
but rather a change of heart.
What am I doing to allow Jesus to change my heart?
Because that is a call to real dying – and rising!

Patrick Foley