

Archbishop Smith: The renewal of the mind

As we embark upon the holy season of Lent, I suggest that the following exhortation from St. Paul's letter to the Romans inspire our prayers for the grace of conversion:

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." (*Rom 12:1-2*)

In Lent, we seek to be changed by God's grace.

We are painfully aware of the sin and disorder in our daily living, and thus earnestly desire to turn our lives around (repentance) so that they be in accord with the will of God. We know that such change is not something we can bring about by our own efforts; we need God's healing and forgiving grace for it to happen.

St. Paul offers a helpful focus when he speaks of our desired transformation occurring through "the renewing of your minds."

Our mindset – the way we think – determines the way we act. If our patterns of speech and behaviour keep us from presenting ourselves to God in a manner "holy and acceptable" to Him, then we may well want to examine very closely the patterns of thought that shape our actions.

It seems to me that we cannot exaggerate the importance today of such self-examination. I often pose the question, "Who are you listening to?" So often, in fact, that for many people I am sounding like a broken record.

Yet we have to ask this, because the voices competing for our attention and seeking to influence our mindset are many. Just think of the variety of messages with which we are bombarded daily through the Internet, television, radio, social media, newspapers, magazines at the checkout counter, etc., etc.

To the degree that I allow their messaging to shape my way of thought I give to them my trust. Yet, are they trustworthy? Do they lead us toward what is true and right?

An easy way to discern the answer to this question is to ask, "Do they lead us

toward Jesus and to an acceptance of what he has revealed in his words and deeds, or do they lead us away from him?"

I once posed the question in this way to a group of grade-twelve students, and they answered right away that most of what they listen to today would seek to lead them away from the Lord.

We can all see the sad truth in this, so we have to ask, "What voices am I allowing to shape my mind? Why?"

In these circumstances, a good Lenten practice would be to take up the reading of the Bible on a daily basis. Using the Scripture readings assigned for daily mass is a good way to do this.

God's Word is trustworthy. Jesus, God's Word made flesh (*Jn 1:14*), speaks to us the words that lead to everlasting life (*Jn 6:68*).

As we read the Bible, let us ask the Holy Spirit, who has inspired the Scriptures, to guide our reading and awaken our understanding, so that God's Word itself will heal and renew our minds and thus transform our lives into living sacrifices pleasing to God.