

Begin With the End in View

On this First Sunday of Lent we look all the way to the First Sunday of Easter for what we are doing and why throughout the whole Season of Lent. Most simply, the purpose of Lent is to prepare us for Easter and the renewal of our Baptismal Promises. The season has two different, related parts: part one from Ash Wednesday through the third week of Lent, part two from the fourth Sunday of Lent until season's end. Part one call us to a life of Gospel conversion and beginning anew, through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, forgiveness, mercy, love of enemies, and honoring the demands of justice. Part two presents the mystery of Jesus as our healer and life-giver who gives us life through his confrontation with death, and gathers into one the scattered children of God. The purpose of part one is to bring us to the recognition of our illusions about our selves; the second part points to Jesus as the one who alone can free us from those illusions. Thus, our Lenten penance may be more effective if we actually fail in our resolutions than if we succeed, for its purpose is not to confirm us in our sense of virtue, but to bring home to us our radical need for salvation.