

Lenten Reflection

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I tend to have mixed emotions about Lent. On the one hand, it is often a particularly grim time of year, at least here in New England. It begins during the coldest part of the winter and by February, snow has lost its charm. Easter and its promise of spring still seem far away. On the other hand, the days have begun to lengthen and the sun slowly begins to feel warmer. I always appreciate the opportunity for self-discipline, anticipation, and prayerful reflection that Lent provides, with each week bringing us closer not only to warmer weather and sunnier days, but more important, to the glorious celebration of Easter and the joy of the risen Christ.

In many ways, it feels as if we have been in Lent for the past year. The coronavirus pandemic has turned the world upside down and offered me constant reminders of the fragility of our earthly life and the endemic suffering all around us, whether we choose to see it or not. It also has given me an opportunity for gratitude. I have been able to recognize just how extraordinarily blessed I am, and because of that, I have tried to become more aware of what I can do to help others in need.

A few years ago, Pope Francis dared lay Catholics to come out of our “caves” of inaction and satisfaction, places in which we are often hiding, and to go out and evangelize. For me reflecting on that admonition has come at an interesting moment in my life this Lent. In July, I will become the first lay and first Black president of the College of the Holy Cross. As I considered whether to take up this new opportunity, I experienced some of what I expect the Holy Father was thinking about when he spoke.

I have a job that I love as dean of Boston College Law School. Was Holy Cross ready to be led by a lay person? But when the position was offered to me, I felt called to accept this new role for reasons both professional and spiritual. On the professional side, I was excited to become a college president and apply what I have learned as dean of a law school to a larger and more complex institution. But I also thought--why me, why now? Then, reflecting on Pope Francis's words and on the many things that have happened in our country this past year, I realized that there were unique ways I could serve as a lay person in this role. It was time for me to exit the cave of the familiar, as well as the cave of the pandemic, and to embrace the light of a new challenge and a new way to serve.