

2020 Lenten Letter

S. Barbara Leonhard, OSF

Dear Sisters and Associates,

As we prepare for the Lenten Season, we are often reminded of Jesus's forty days in the desert that preceded his active ministry, a time in which he sought clarity about who he was and how he was to take up his mission. We face these same questions many times in life, and each time we find ourselves needing to let go of images and ideas about our truth that no longer serve us well. We embrace this letting go, because we have experienced a call to something deeper, to an identity that is more in keeping with the divine Presence within us.

We can let go of roles, beloved ministries, and specific ways of caring when it is time to do so, if we trust that the fire of God's presence is still with us and within us, working in new ways.

The enclosed poem, "Where the Breath Begins" is a powerful reflection on desert times. Jan Richardson includes it in a section of Lenten poems in her book, *Circle of Grace*. She assumes that her readers are not unfamiliar with loss, the challenge of letting go, or as she writes, "some crumbling." It is a poem that can accompany us when we feel empty, deflated, or alone. She encourages us to look closely for the unique graces of such times, and assures us that "though it may be hard to see it now, this is where your greatest blessing will find you."

This is the very place from which new life will spring forth. We share a deep desire for prayer and personal reflection, a longing to be grounded in the graciousness of God's love for us. Lent is a season to foster that desire, allowing that which keeps us from honoring this longing to fall away. We know that we never pray alone. Whether we find ourselves during this Lent in a place of pain and confusion or a time of energy and hope, we join our prayer with people throughout the world who know these same realities. We desire to be still, long enough to discover ourselves known and held in divine compassion. It is how we come to know who we are and who we are becoming. It is how we ready ourselves for the next moment of resurrection beyond anything we can now imagine.

May each of us find for ourselves a daily time of quiet prayer this Lenten season – to allow ourselves to be turned toward Love, to hear ourselves called by name and reawakened to the spark of the divine with us. Only then will compassion become our way of being, and letting go an opening to graces yet to be discovered.

Blessings as we make this Lenten journey together,

S. Barb Leonhard

Where the Breath Begins

Dry
and dry
and dry
in each direction.

Dust dry.
Desert dry.
Bone dry.

And here
in your own heart:
dry,
the center of your chest
a bare valley
stretching out
every way you turn.

Did you think
this was where
you had come to die?

It's true that
you may need
to do some crumbling,
yes.
That some things
you have protected
may want to be laid bare,
yes.
That you will be asked to let go
and let go,
yes.

But listen.
This is what
a desert is for.

If you have come here
desolate,
if you have come here
deflated,
then thank your lucky stars

the desert is where you have landed—
here where it is hard
to hide,
here where it is unwise
to rely on your own devices,
here where you will
have to look
and look again
and look close
to find what refreshment waits
to reveal itself to you.

I tell you,
though it may be hard
to see it now,
this is where
your greatest blessing
will find you.

I tell you,
this is where you will receive
your life again.

I tell you,
this is where
the breath begins.

— Jan Richardson, *Circle of Grace*