

**Ash Wednesday**  
St. John's Episcopal Church  
February 14, 2018  
Priest in Charge, Rev. Diane Wong

During the Olympic season, we hear many stories of sacrifices, sacrifices made by both the parents and athletes. A couple of nights ago, we saw 17-year-old Chloe Kim won the gold medal in a snowboarding event. Her father was in the spotlight as well because of the sacrifices he made for his daughter's passion. He immigrated to the U.S. 1998 with only \$800 in his pocket and worked as a dishwasher. His dream was for his daughter to have a good education, a good college experience, and a happy life. Ten years ago, when Chloe showed great interest in snowboarding, he quit his engineering job so he could have time to support her. He would drive her five-and-a-half hours each way every weekend so she could practice. After she won the gold medal, said, "My dad has definitely sacrificed a lot for me and I don't know if I could do it, if I was in his shoes."

Figure skater Vincent Zhou is another example. His mother worked at Oracle in Silicon Valley and owns numerous software patents. Her son showed a passion for skating and she dropped nearly everything, "moved all over the country; living in apartments with no hot water and no air conditioning," to find the best place for her son to train. They finally settled back in Southern California for training, and his mom drove 500-mile each weekend back to visit the rest of the family.

The mother of Adam Rippon, another figure skater, raised six children as a single parent in northeast Pennsylvania. According to Adam, everything in her life was hectic, stressful and an act of juggling – money, time, priorities. When he showed a passion for skating, his mother Kelly found time to drive three hours each way so he could receive the best coaching in Philadelphia. She eventually re-mortgaged the house to pay for everything. Now the family is raising money to go to South Korea to see Adam in the Olympics.

These parents made these sacrifices willingly, and with love. During Lent, we also talk about making sacrifices. Do we make those sacrifices willingly and with love? For years, we were led to believe to sacrifice for Lent we are meant to give up things we enjoy. No wonder we dread Lent. For years, we looked at sacrifices the wrong way. If we look at what sacrifice really means, we might be able to make sacrifices willingly and with love, just like the parents of these Olympic athletes.

The word and understanding of sacrifice come from the Latin phrase that means "to make sacred." In ancient times, in the human divine relationship, an animal was made sacred and was given to God as a sacred gift to show the sacredness of this human divine relationship. The external act is a manifestation of the internal disposition, which is reverence and love towards the almighty Creator. This was not about suffering.

For many of the parents of the Olympic athletes, the dreams and life of their children are sacred and they do whatever is necessary to show that; and what they do - the driving, the moving, the giving up of a career, and moving to a strange country, reflects the love they have for their children.

If we are serious about making sacrifices for Lent, we may want to think what it is that we want to make sacred. What can we do to make sacred our relationship with God? What is our inner disposition that is shown by what we do? For example, as a sacrifice, we may want to make time to journal. In doing that, we may be making sacred the time given to us. We are acknowledging that our time is a gift from God, and we offer our time to God as a sign of our love and reverence for God. Or we could be making sacred our thoughts and feeling in our journaling; and we offer our journaling to God as a sign of our friendship with God and our trust in God.

I could decide to exercise more in Lent to make sacred my body which is God's creation, and my exercise is my way of appreciating and respecting this gift and giving thanks to God. I could decide to take time to help others during Lent to see Christ in those people, to see the sacredness of other human beings, and doing so as a way of connecting with the incarnate Christ.

I think if we use "to make sacred" as the basis of our sacrifices, what we do would be more meaningful and perhaps would even change the way we look at our life, others and our relationship with God. We might even enjoy our sacrifices and continue with them even when Lent is over.

This Ash Wednesday is special because it happens to fall on Valentine's Day. What St. Valentine did serves as another example of making sacred. There are at least three different St Valentines, and all of them are martyrs. One was a priest in Rome; one was a bishop of a city in Umbria; and the third was a martyr in the Roman province of Africa. The Valentine that is written about most is the priest in Rome. He was executed by the Roman emperor Claudius the Cruel on February 14<sup>th</sup>.

Emperor Claudius initiated and conducted many bloody and unpopular campaigns, and as a result he had trouble recruiting soldiers; but he blamed this on the ordinary Roman men. He said their lack of interest in joining the army was because of their strong attachment to their wives and families, so he banned all marriages and engagements in Rome.

Priest Valentine defied the order and continued to marry couples in secret. When what he was doing was discovered, he was arrested, sentenced to be beaten to death with clubs and his head cutoff. All this took place on February 14<sup>th</sup>. We may think of Valentine's Day as a day of romance, but there was a great deal of violence connected with this day. What was Valentine trying to make sacred? What was his inner disposition?

Ash Wednesday reminds us that life is a gift from God. We don't have much time in our earthly journey, so we should use this time to make sacred the gifts we have been given. Whatever we each decide to do, I encourage us to see what it is that you want to make sacred, what inner disposition we want to show about our relationship with God. When we keep that as our focus, we are returning to God. Amen