

## **SCREEN: I Love Lent image**

I love Lent.

That might sound strange, but it's true....I love Lent.

Don't get me wrong, Advent is great getting ready for Christmas.

But everybody loves Christmas....even people who aren't Christian and don't go to Mass get excited for Christmas.

Lent is different.

We do things in Lent that, by the world's standards, are pretty weird.

Putting ashes on our foreheads, fasting, abstaining from meat, denying ourselves things we enjoy.

We pray the Stations of the Cross, wash feet on Holy Thursday and kiss crosses on Good Friday.

Who does these things?

Only us. Only us.

Why do we do these things?

Because the 40 days of Lent are a call to change.

We are being told to change our attitudes, our behaviors, and our thinking so we can refocus our lives on what matters most.

And what matters most?

Love!

Love matters most.

Jesus was asked one time, *"What's the greatest commandment?"*

He answered, *love God with everything you've got AND love your neighbor as yourself.*

Lent is all about love.

And with so much happening in the world right now, this Lent can't come at a more crucial time.

Our culture has become really good at hate, and anger, and division.

Over and over, day after day, we're told to only love those who look like us, talk like us, and worship like us.

And don't trust anybody else because,

they're not your neighbor, not your friend, may even be your enemy.

The world even says, we only have to love those who are like us.

## **SCREEN: Everybody Always main screen**

This Lent we're focusing on Jesus' command to love.

Over and over, day after day for three years Jesus taught his followers to love *everybody always*.

He taught this through every encounter and healing and parable and sermon.

Love *everybody, always*.

Our Lenten message series is titled, *Everybody always*.

It's based on the book by Bob Goff.

Those in a small group and in our newly formed Lenten small groups are reading the book and you can too.

Grab the book after Mass in the entranceway for just \$5.

It's an easy read and a fun read and Bob applies Jesus' message to modern life.

Let's get started.

### **SCREEN: Jesus in the desert**

So every year, Lent begins with the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert, which happened at the start of Jesus' ministry.

For 40 days he prayed and fasted to prepare for his mission.

Our season of Lent is modeled on Jesus' time in the desert.

Three times the devil appeared to tempt him.

Now if you look at what Jesus was being tempted with, you can see the opposite of his entire mission.

Essentially, the devil was saying,

*"Don't make your life all about others, make it all about you!"*

*Look out for #1: turn these stones into bread!*

*Don't serve others; make them serve you! Grab for all the power and glory you can.*

*Don't sacrifice your life for others; make others care for you!"*

Jesus resisted the devil's temptations.

He emerged from the desert resolved to live and love as God wanted him to.

Jesus' ministry was a rejection of the world and its message of judging, dividing, and hating.

He took time to listen to people, to be with them in their pain and sorrow, to meet them right where they were, sins and all.

And by being with others, he could see beyond the labels, the judgements and saw the beauty of God within.

Jesus teaches that every person, regardless of his/her past is worthy of God's love and forgiveness.

He didn't see Samaritans as enemies,

or lepers as sinners,

or tax collectors as traitors,

or prodigals and prostitutes as beyond redemption.

He gave people a second chance.

Jesus met people right where they were and loved them unconditionally.

Not only did Jesus meet people right where *they were*;

he met them right where *he was*!

Think about it, in his entire three years of ministry,

Jesus never traveled more than 100 miles from home.  
And he didn't seek out the mighty and powerful.  
His ministry was with those he interacted with every day,  
people he encountered on the road, people who followed and walked with him.  
He was showing his followers what they must do to enter His Kingdom:  
love as he loved and meet people right where they are.  
This is how the Good News is shared;  
the Good News that God's love is unconditional and is for everybody.  
God's love turns enemies into friends and makes everyone neighbors.

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This Lent God is commanding you to live and love like Jesus.  
And all your worship, your prayers, all your Lenten sacrifices---  
your fasting, your denials, your abstaining---  
has one purpose and one purpose only; to help you to love everybody always.

Now I can hear your questions,

*Father Mike are you saying I have to love the people I don't like?*

*Family members I avoid?*

*Co-workers who drive me up the wall?*

*Parishioners who are annoying at times?*

*People who creep me out?*

Yes, everybody means everybody.

And 'always' means, when you feel like and don't feel like it,  
when it wears you out, even when it's really hard.

And let's be honest and admit, it can be really hard to do this:  
to love everybody always, no exceptions.

Why must you do it?

It's how God loves you!

God keeps loving you when you do things that drive Him and others up the wall.  
When others want to avoid you---God never leaves you and God still loves you.  
When you sin---when you're the prodigal---God still loves you unconditionally  
and welcomes you back with open arms.

If you're doubtful that you can really love the same way,  
know that It is only possible with the help of the Holy Spirit;  
the Holy Spirit within you.

But the more you do it, the more you reach out in love, the better you get at it.

It's like an athlete in training or a musician practicing.

When the training begins, it is really hard.

But little by little, with each passing day, it gets easier and the person gets better at it.  
So for 40 days, we are all in training in the ways of love.

Seven weeks for us all to pray and practice loving everybody always.

How do we start?

Let's begin by acknowledging that there are so many things going on in the world that you and I can't fix.

I can't end wars or stop terrorism or eliminate all acts of hatred or prejudice and neither can you.

What most people do nowadays is complain, argue and rage, which doesn't fix, solve, or help anything.

Most of the time, the best you and I can do about those big things is pray.

So here's where you can help.

God has uniquely placed you in the world to make a difference.

You can impact the lives of some people in a way no one else can.

You don't need to cross the ocean to love your neighbor, sometimes all you need to do is cross your street.

In this series, and throughout Lent we are going to focus on specific ways you can truly love your neighbor; literally your neighbor--- the people who live on your street in your neighborhood.

Just like Jesus did, God is calling you to love people where YOU are.

See, you and I can't reach out to billions of people, but we can reach six people.

I can't learn six billion names, but I can learn six.

You can't invite the whole world to St. Pius, but there are people living beside you who you can invite.

God has placed you where you can have the maximum impact and influence.

And your love of your neighbors starts simply with a few easy steps.

Step one: pray for your neighbors.

Even if you don't know their names, pray for them; visualize them and pray for them every day.

Step two: also easy, say hello the next time you see them.

Just a simply 'hi' a wave, a brief conversation.

It's a beginning, a start to breakdown walls and barriers and obstacles.

It's a first step to loving more deeply like Jesus.

**SCREEN: Everybody Always main screen**

Our greatest temptation this Lent,

is to approach these weeks like we have every other Lent.

To make some minor changes, give up something we like for 40 days, then at Easter, go back to the way things were before.

Let's say no to this temptation.

Let's decide this Lent will be different.

Let's resolve, starting today, that in Lent of 2019  
we are going to love everybody, always. Amen. +