

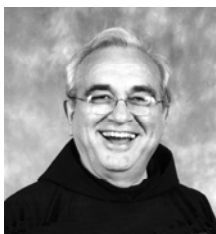
Lent

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El Pueblo de la Mancha People of the Stain

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Squeezed into a slightly larger than a coffin sized cell; gazing out a pane of glass affectionately called a window onto '*la grand manzana*' with its convergence of people gathering from Madison Square Garden, The Long Island Railroad, the New Jersey Transit, Metro North and from that quintessential department store urging its customers to *BELIEVE*, a pastoral minister is heard saying: "*Don't feed the frenzy!*"

The Liturgical Day of Frenzy is here: ASH WEDNESDAY! The day of the stain! *Miercoles de ceniza; el dia de la mancha.*

Adam and Eve tried to hide their stain after their fall; Cain roamed the earth with the stain on his forehead. Mary conceived without stain.

For a Nation so preoccupied with removing stains, and cleanliness there is one stain that is cherished and so sought after that it is simply a must to bear; must be had not only for one's own self but the many who remain at home receiving the stain from a Kleenex tissue.

In our Nation we have a solution to stains. Lady Macbeth would have loved to have the new Clorox Stick. So neat; so compact; so easy to carry. Get a stain; zip out the Clorox stick and press rub and "out damn spot!" Easy answers! A solution for anything!

This reminds me of an experience as a child at one of our all inclusive family dinners. Picture a table stretching the entire length of the house through every room and even every doorway connecting the rooms. Some diners are arguing about sports; others about the neighbors or their kids. All are waiting to see who would stain the freshly laundered tablecloth with crumbs from the loaf of very crisp Italian bread or from the careless eating of the pasta. The heartiest eater would at first taste mar the tablecloth and the finger pointing would begin.

On this day – *Wednesday of the Stain* – there is a frenzy heard around the world; everyone is present; everyone is a member of '*pueblo de la mancha.*' Everyone must be marked with the stain. This mark connects us to one another and to our forebears clinging to the hope of the aura of God. In the movie *Avatar* the people went to the tree named *Utralaymokrlya* and they could hear the voices of their forebears.

We are stained; there is a universal awareness. As friars, at our Tree of Forebears, we hear the usual strains of a lack of fraternity, poor courtesy habits, underlying indifference. And we step forward to be marked once again with the stain of Ashes. Will we take out our zap stick; wipe away the stain, proceed as usual? This stain remains; a shadow of it stays with us; rub as we might there is no magical trick to remove the stain except the faith in the Risen Christ.

La mancha is our link; our courage to proceed to that original goodness in us that is the tender touch of our Creator. Our stain is removed in the Risen Christ. The stain of Christ is his precious blood and His resurrection light removes all our stain. Let the smallest pin hole of resurrected light push open that pin hole.

Anyone given to the reality of our human stains knows intuitively that it is a lifelong process. A day of frenzy is no answer but it is another accumulation on the road to serenity, peace and wholeness (aka: holiness).

DO NOT FEED THE FRENZY!