

## Lent: A Time to Get Back on Track

In the days following January 27<sup>th</sup>, we were all horrified at the sight of a terrible train wreck. A deeply disturbed young man had parked his SUV on the tracks. By the time he changed his mind about where to go in life, it was too late. The impact derailed the train, causing 11 deaths and 200 injuries. Maybe the troubled youth thought that commuter trains are invincible. They aren't.

It doesn't take much to derail a train. It doesn't take much to derail a life, either. Whether the cause of our jumping the tracks is a warped rail, a fracture in the line, a seemingly minor obstacle or something really dangerous, the consequences can be equally devastating. Once a speeding train is off the rails, what was before a protective shell can become a death trap. At the very least, one thing is certain: a derailed train will never reach its appointed destination.

Life is a lot like that. And Lent is an opportunity to get ourselves back on track. With God, the derailment is never so irreparable, nor the destruction so total, that a repentant person can't get back on the rails and reach his or her goal. It just takes enough humility to admit the problem and confidence to seek out the help. From there on, the grace of a God who loves to forgive kicks into action.

For most of us, however, the real problem isn't derailment. It's just heading off in the wrong direction. Someone switches the rail, and ever so slightly we veer off course. Eventually, what began as a tiny deviation becomes hopelessly major. And given what it takes to turn a train around 180 degrees, we often just keep rolling along. After all, isn't any destination just as valid as another?

So long as you're enjoying the trip, does it really matter where you're heading? Isn't it more adventurous not to know where you're going? Besides, you can say that the original destination was chosen for you, but now you're making the choice. Never mind that somebody you don't know switched the tracks on you.

When a train is derailed, everyone sees it. Denial is useless. But when you're off course, no one may notice except the one in charge of the railways. In fact, you might remain completely oblivious until you step off in the wrong place. Yes, that's what's happening to most people. But Lent can help us here, too.

A person who lives Lent well finds out quickly whether or not he or she is off on a tangent. They receive the grace to apply the brakes and turn the train around. They develop a new taste for the original destination. And they don't mind the lost time, because the pain of what's behind gives them extra energy for the road ahead. Plus the determination to make sure it doesn't happen

again. Now, they feel the destination is their own. And they can offer a moving testimony. After all, by now they realize Who put the rails in place.

I almost forgot to mention the worst train problem. That's when it ain't going nowhere. Unfortunately, not even God will budge a train that simply doesn't want to move. Pray for those trains. They may never get in a wreck, or arrive at the wrong destination, but no one who rides them ever reaches their goal.

May the good Lord, the Great Conductor of souls and the Chief Engineer of the railway of life, use this sacred time of Lent to help us all reach our Destination.

“Turn to me and be safe, all you ends of the earth! For I am God; there is no other” (Isaiah 45:22). “Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God” (Joel 2:12-13). “Come, let us return to the Lord!” (Hosea 6:1). And yes: “All aboard the Easter Express!”

*By Fr. Dean McFalls, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Lathrop (Feb. 10, 2005)*