

**Fr. Dan Edwards
The Obega Family**

Lent 1b.06

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Lent is a lot more than giving up chocolate
or trying to improve our personal habits.
That's all fine if it somehow grows your soul.

But Lent is supposed to be bigger.

Listen to what the Lord says in Isaiah
about repentance:

“Is such the fast that I choose,
to humble oneself . . . to bow down
his head like a rush,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes
under him?

Will you call this a fast . . . acceptable to
the Lord?

Is not this the fast I choose,
. . . to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free?

Is it not to share your bread with the
hungry,
and bring the homeless into your
house.

and bring the naked, to cover him . . .
?”

In the Litany of Penitence with which we began
this season,

we prayed “Accept our repentance Lord . . .
for our blindness

to human need and suffering. . . ?”

To repent of that blindness, we need to see
– to really look at the story of the Obega family.

They live in a mud and thatched house
in Robona, a village in the western
mountains of Uganda.

They are typical subsistence farmers,
growing beans, bananas, cassava and
other vegetables.

But they cannot afford fertilizer,
so the crops sometimes make and
sometimes don't.

When the crops are poor, the family goes

hungry.

They become weakened and their ability to farm is less.

So the crops get worse and they get hungrier.

But there's also good news.

Debra Obega, age 14, and her brother David, age 12,

are now able to attend school in the afternoons

after working the fields each morning.

At 14, Debra is now in the 5th grade.

At 12, David is in the 4th.

Debra and David are very lucky to be getting some education and they are lucky to be 12 and 14.

19% of children in sub-Saharan Africa die before they are 5.

But things are getting better.

In 1970, 25% of children died before they turned 5.

Debra and David have a 3-year-old sister, Juliette,

who has a chance to make it past 5 too.

Through a charitable organization like ERD, all three children have been vaccinated against diseases

But her best friend, Prose, has been having a difficult time.

Prose contracted malaria from a mosquito bite.

Every 8 seconds, a child dies from a preventable disease

such as malaria or dengue fever.

The mosquito netting that would have prevented

Prose from contracting malaria would have cost \$3

– but that was \$3 her mother didn't have.

We had it.

Perhaps we spent it on a cup of designer coffee.

The malaria caused Prose to suffer from high

fevers
which almost killed her.
The medical cost of controlling her fevers was
25 cents.

The story of Prose has a happy ending.
Her malaria was eventually cured by an
American organization
that supports community development in
poor nations.

The cost of saving her life was \$25.
I don't know which group saved Prose.
It could have been Episcopal Relief and
Development.

It's the sort of thing we do.
One child. One life. \$25.

When we talk about Christian morality,
this is what we mean.

When we talk about repentance,
we don't mean self-flagellation
and talking gloomily about our
unworthiness.

We mean: One Child. One Life. \$25.

"Is not this the fast I choose," says the Lord,
". . . to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless into your house.
and bring the naked, to cover him . . . ?"

The enormity of suffering is not a reason to
despair or give up.

We are making enormous progress.
The number of people living on less than \$1 per
day
was cut in half between 1981 and 2001.

There are still 1.1 billion people living on less
than \$1 per day
– but there is every reason to believe that
number
can be reduced to 0 by the year, 2015,
if we can only find the grace in our hearts
to do it.

Literacy levels in developing countries have

risen 6%
in the past decade.
We can fund universal education for all children
for a fraction of what the United States
alone
spends on cosmetics alone.
This is what Christian morality is about.

The Blessed Virgin Mary said,
My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my
Savior . . .
he has put down the mighty from their
thrones
and exalted those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty
away.”

John the Baptist said,
“He who has two coats,
let him share with him who has
none;
and he who has food, let him do likewise.”

Brothers and sisters, we have two coats.
We have food.
John the Baptist is talking to us.

Jesus said,
“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
because he has anointed me to preach
good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the
captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed .
. . .”

St. John said,
“He who does not love abides in death
But if anyone has the world’s goods (that
would be us)
and sees his brother in need,
yet closes his heart against him,
how does God’s love abide in him?”

Little children, let us not love in word or
speech,
but in deed and in truth.”

Lent is a time to repent,
to turn around, to change our lives
in a way that will change the lives
of the Obega children in Uganda,
and children in Haiti, and in the
Sudan.

A Christian faith that is not passionately
committed
to alleviating the suffering of the poorest of
the poor
is an imposter.

And those who claim to be filled with the Spirit
but do not bring good news to the poor
are charlatans.

This is how we heal the world.

St. James is very clear when he says,
“If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of
daily food,
and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace,
be warmed and filled,’
what does it profit?”

James means if they need food and clothing,
we should give them food and clothing.

If they need HIV medication, we should give
them HIV medication.

If they need a \$3 mosquito net, we should give
them a mosquito net.

This is how we heal the world,
and without healing the world,
there is no healing of our souls.

Amen.