



## ICYC and Lent

The first weekend of March I had the good fortune to attend the annual Idaho Catholic Youth Conference in Boise. So did 180 young people from parishes throughout the Diocese of Baker—north, south, east, west, and center. We made up a very recognizable contingent of the 1600 youth who took over Bishop Kelly High School from Friday night to Sunday noon.

When so many young people come together to express and deepen their faith in Jesus Christ and channel it in new directions, they discover that being Catholic goes way beyond the borders of parish or diocese; the faith they live at home immediately connects them with those who believe as they do all over the country and all over the world. A taste for the Church *universal* now enters their religious experience—and an awakening sense of the part they are called to play in its mission.

Conference organizers wisely scheduled several hours for confessions both Saturday afternoon and evening, and long were the lines of young people waiting to take advantage of the opportunity. Time and again as my young penitents went in peace, their sins forgiven, I marveled at the soul-searching sincerity with which they laid their sins before me and the unflinching honesty with which they opened their hearts in discussion.

These humbling confessional encounters with young people have been among the greatest joys of my priesthood. Their capacity for confession took me by surprise when I was first ordained, for as a teen I never confessed with such sensitivity and insight; it took me many years longer to catch up to the level of authenticity they've already attained. I've come to expect it from them, and they do not disappoint. Few things do more to strengthen my hope for the Church of the future.

As I write, the future of the Church is Lent: tomorrow is Ash Wednesday. By the time you read these words, the cross on your forehead will have faded and begun to work its way into your mind and heart. For Lent teaches us to “order our days aright,” as Scripture says.

The right order of the cross we are marked with has two dimensions. Nailed with Christ to the horizontal beam, we can't move our left arm to satisfy our desire for bread or water or comfort; nor can we move our right arm to put other people down. This “horizontal” mindfulness leads us to fast and perform works of mercy, to set in right order our relation to ourselves and our relations with others. Being nailed with Christ to the vertical beam of the cross makes us mindful that we can't walk wherever we will to find our way home to God; rather, we must follow the One who is the Way to the Father.

Unless we plant the vertical beam firmly in the ground of our lives, the horizontal beam lacks all foundation. Unless we live in right relation with God, unless we're really on the way home to Him, we'll wander aimlessly, unable to relate to

ourselves or others in the Truth that sets us free. That's why, this Lent, each of us is called to take our place in the worldwide line of penitents waiting to step into the mystery of reconciliation anew.