

Years ago I was a street preacher. I stood on a box in front of a department store in downtown Baltimore and began to speak. I was in the seminary at the time and was with a group of seminarians. It was an experience I have not forgotten.

At another time, a street preacher set up his soapbox on a corner and began to tell passers by about their need for God. He was getting nowhere. All of a sudden he switched tactics. As office workers from a nearby building came out for lunch the preacher would fix his eye on someone, point at him and shout “guilty”. Then he would point at someone else and shout “guilty.” Soon the office workers began to look guilty.

Well that’s not my intention this morning, but I am hoping that as Lent begins you will pause and take a look inside yourself. This is a wonderful time to change the direction in which we are looking for happiness. I don’t know what burdens you may be carrying, e.g., maybe a child who won’t speak to you, perhaps an addiction to anger or gossip, a belief you are not good enough; the list goes on and on.

For some reason are you unhappy with yourself or live with the belief you got a bad deal? Maybe someone walked away from you. You may have the habit of hurting people unintentionally or even intentionally, maybe feeling sorry for yourself.

Now is the time to open your heart to God. God loves you. He wants the best for you. But how in the world do I change? How do I trade in my feeling of anxiety or guilt or whatever, for gratitude that I am loved, I am lovable?

One night a young man, Piri, was lying on his cell bunk in prison. He was a drug addict and an attempted killer. Suddenly he realized what a mess he’d made of his life. He felt an overwhelming desire to pray. But he was sharing his cell with another prisoner called ‘the thin kid’. So, he waited.

After he thought the ‘thin kid’ was asleep, he climbed out of his bunk, knelt down on the cold concrete floor and prayed. He said, “I told God what was in my heart.... I talked to him plain... no big words... I talked to Him of my wants and lacks, of my disappointments... I felt like I could even cry... something I hadn’t been able to do for years.”

After Piri finished his prayer, a small voice said “Amen”. It was ‘the thin kid’ and then he said, “I believe in God also.” And then he said “I’m thinking God is always with us. Sometimes we aren’t with Him.”

We are beginning a very special time of year! And we have prayer, the Eucharist, Reconciliation.