

## ASH WEDNESDAY – 2.26.20

Monday's front page of the SF Chronicle had a great human interest story that caught my eye. The article was entitled: "Artist's 'entire life' sold." It was about Kevin Keaney, a man from Berkeley who's a landscaper, but whose real passion is being an artist - a prolific painter of huge colorful works.



I love the vibrancy of his colors, the boldness of his style. His work are reminiscent of Chagall or Picasso. He recently received an email from a man who said he had purchased a few of Kevin's paintings and that he was interested in his work. Kevin was taken back by the email because, although painting is his passion, he never marketed himself. He has no website, he's not on Facebook, and has no agent. In fact, he's never shown his work, so how did this person purchase anything Kevin painted? All his paintings, some 225 of them, along with drawings, collages and sculptures were carefully locked away in a storage unit in San Francisco.

Kevin began to piece together the devastating realization that his entire life had just been sold. He paid for the storage rental through a monthly withdrawal from his debit card. When

he replaced his battered debit card with a new one, he didn't think to notify the storage facility of its new number, so the bill wasn't being automatically paid. If a bill isn't paid at the storage center three months in a row the company empties the contents and auctions everything off. That's exactly what happened to Kevin's paintings. One man bought up nearly all the paintings and, when Kevin tried to get in touch with him, he wouldn't meet with him. Of the 225 paintings he had created, Keaney was only able to retrieve eight of them.



The storage company had sent him notices that he was delinquent, but he never opened the letters. He said he learned some hard lessons. In a confessional moment he said: *I messed up and I was lazy. I had all this art in a black space that I wasn't really sharing with anyone. I had this experience and, whatever you want to call it, fate or bad luck forced me to come to grips with the fact that I was neglecting a really important part of my practice.*



I think there's a Lenten lesson for us in this artist's story, especially if we've been neglecting really important parts of our practice as Christians. We're each filled with beauty and goodness; we're God's work of art. And God calls each of us in many ways to show our works of art, to let the inner life of the Spirit show through us in what we say and do, in the kind of persons we are. Lent invites us to ask: Do we respond to God? Do we ignore the invitation? Do we store out of sight the many good things we could be doing? Like Kevin, Do we mess up? Are we too lazy?

Are we neglecting the things that are most important in life. What forces us to neglect the really important parts of our lives is sin. It can take the form of laziness or selfishness or a lack of self-confidence and a failure to appreciate the gift we each are to the world. So, I propose that the question should NOT be: "What are you going to GIVE UP for Lent?" The better question is: "What are you going to GIVE for Lent?" What will you GIVE... of your time to someone who needs you, your smile to brighten someone's day, your compassion to support someone who's hurting, your prayer to spend quiet time with the Lord and with his Word in the scriptures?



St. Ignatius of Loyola wrote: *There are very few people who realize what God would make of them if they abandoned themselves into God's hands, and let themselves be formed by God's grace.* So, this Lent, let yourself be formed by God's grace. Unlock the storage unit of your heart and let your inner beauty shine through. Remember, you are God's work of art and only you can express what God has put inside of you.

*Father John Kasper, OSFS*