

## Of Bad Weather & False Heavens

While there are some people who love the winter, there are many more who regard the weather of the season as “bad.” One might wonder why it is that winter weather is to be regarded as “bad” weather? I suppose that, at the most basic level, it is considered “bad” because it inhibits our movement and activity. The whole spectrum of outdoor activities is reduced to very few. Traveling can be difficult, if not hazardous, when things get slippery. And the clothing we are required to wear can be stifling and suffocating. All of these seem to be negatives and, therefore, the winter weather is “bad.”

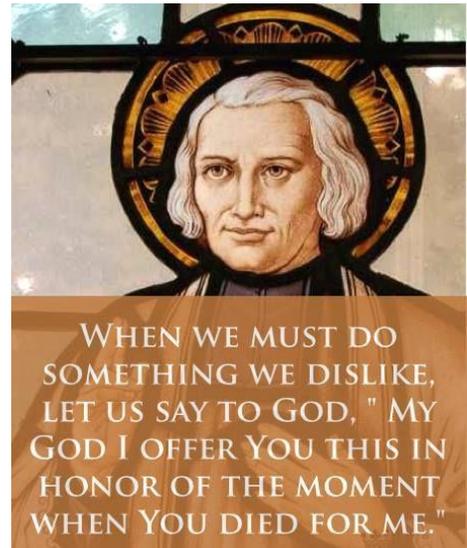
I have never been a fan of this season. In all honesty, when I was younger, I harbored a little resentment that the dank, dreary and muddy season coincided with the season of penance and self-denial. Thinking about my cousins in sunny Southern California and how different their experience of Lent might be, I plaintively wondered to myself, “Isn’t it enough that I am giving up good weather for Lent?”

A degree of spiritual maturity has finally set in, and I try to avoid complaining. Weather is just weather: It isn’t “good” or “bad.” It is what it is. But, at a deeper level, the apparent “denial” which the winter weather represents is probably a blessing. Bracing oneself against the cold wind and stinging rain or snow is an acute reminder that we are not in heaven yet. And/or, from another point of view—that of my deceased grandfather--- all of this dankness and dreariness is setting the stage for the great rebirth which is spring, (He used to refer to snow as the “poor man’s fertilizer.”) In fact, the word “Lent” is derived from the Middle English word for “Spring,” (*lencten*).

Southern California, South Florida, Bahamas, Bermuda. . . they are all “false heavens.” Don’t get me wrong: I don’t begrudge anyone who escapes the winter to places like these. But, in a more general sense, the temptation to escape into comfort at every turn is precisely the challenge Lent places before us. This is a consciousness which can be lived on the sunny golf course or the snowy driveway. The challenge is to be conscious about our relationship with the value of comfort and the

allure of “false heavens,” which come in many forms.

In a way, this spiritual consciousness is a corollary to that wisdom which tells us to not to flee from our problems or troubles but to face them head on. Accepting life on life’s own terms or, better yet, taking up one’s cross, is the way of avoiding the seduction of a “false heaven.”



Spiritual masters of our tradition give expression to the development of this consciousness in many and varied ways:

*‘Love, self-restraint, contemplation and prayer accord with God’s will, while gluttony, licentiousness and things that increase them pander to the flesh. That is why “they that are in the flesh cannot conform to God’s will” (Rom. 8:8). But “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh together with the passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:24)’*

St. Maximus the Confessor

*“The soul that is attached to anything however much good there may be in it, will not arrive at the liberty of divine union. For whether it be a strong wire rope or a slender and delicate thread that holds the bird, it matters not, if it really holds it fast; for, until the cord be broken the bird cannot fly.”*

St. John of the Cross

And a recent Pope too:

*“The world offers you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.”*

Pope Benedict XVI