

Lenten Housekeeping

When I hear that stirring Lenten gospel about Jesus clearing the temple (Jn 2:13-25) my thoughts always turn to the 'clutter' that might be taking up space in the temple of my own personhood. Lent is that welcome reminder to 'cleanse' my lifestyle to make room for a more authentic gospel spirit. And I am not alone in this annual 'purge' as the following reflections of three friends show: Says Louise: 'Last summer my husband and I took our family for a long beach holiday along Australia's beautiful eastern coastline. We felt close to nature and freed from phone, fax and work demands. In our relaxed state we spent most of our time in swimmers and shorts. It was during this period of "time out" that I began thinking about how cluttered my life is back home. Travelling with children, I had packed so many "just in case" items which we didn't need. The distasteful thought occurred that when I got home I would have to unpack it all again! How much hassle I create for myself by cramming my lifestyle with clothes and other things! I began to think about how little we need to get by, but being part of a consumer-driven society I tend to look upon the "extras" as "essentials". I returned from holidays with a new Lenten resolution to simplify my material lifestyle.' (Louise)

For James, Lenten purges are about clearing the air waves: 'I admit to being a radio junkie. I often have commercial radio playing as background to whatever I'm doing. I love the instant flow of music and communication. But there is another side that bothers me: like being constantly bombarded by advertisements. A lot of the music is rather repetitive and much of talkback radio can be brainless. I began to wonder if my radio habits were cluttering my head and my heart, filling up my emotional and thinking space with junk. So I decided to cut down on radio - drive in silence, play tasteful CDs, and so on. As a result I am hearing things I never heard before - the beauty of silence, the richness of my own thoughts and feelings, and the presence of my God.' And Jodie has this insight to share: 'My neighbours have three children in primary school. When I call by on weekends the family is nearly always at home together. They are a family who seem very present to one another. When I remarked on this one day the husband explained that it was the result of a conscious decision. "Like so many of our peers we used to spend our weekends ferrying our children to ballet lessons, soccer practice, music lessons, karate lessons... But weekends became one exhausting pressure, and we weren't spending any time together! So now we limit our

children to just one activity each week. It's our way of raising them to value family time.'" But enough from the prophets-next-door. It's over to you and I to identify our own unique brand of 'clutter'. Is it amassing material possessions? Communication clutter: TV, radio, internet? Chronic busy-ness? Preoccupation with the past or future? Or perhaps our internal living spaces are filled with negative thoughts. It is an excellent Lenten question: What kind of clutter is part of my lifestyle? And what will I do to clear it? Come Easter, may we find ourselves enjoying a refreshing, Spirit-filled breathing space. •

