

FROM THE ARCHBISHOP

## Try taking an emotional inventory during Lent

I am surprised there are any functioning pedestrian street-crossing buttons in Seattle, considering the way we mistreat them. Since I walk to the office most days, I cross a number of streets, often amid heavy traffic, and I make frequent use of those sturdy-looking metal buttons.

One day, it dawned on me that I often pressed the button twice — for emphasis, I suppose, or in the vain hope that doing so would speed things up. Then I began to notice that other people did the same, and that often they hammer the button with their fists so ferociously that it's a wonder it even works. (I read that in some cities the buttons are purposely deactivated.)

When I realized that my habit of pushing the button twice was irrational, I stopped doing so. I figured a little less violence toward an inanimate object, and a little less insistence on my presence, would do Seattle and its traffic technology some good.

Years ago I decided that when flying, I would always request an aisle seat. I've flown so much that looking out the window no longer holds fascination for me, and I am always uncomfortable asking others to leave their seats if I am sitting by the window and need a break.

If an aisle seat is not available, a window seat will do, but a middle seat is another matter. I am not typically claustrophobic, but finding myself crammed between two other passengers is an experience I never enjoy. Which arm rest should I use? Am I allowed to use either? Neither? Both? Thus a personal rule: Avoid middle seats at all cost.

The way one uses the space around his or her seat on an airplane varies greatly from person to person. One's size is not the determining factor in how much space he or she occupies. Small people using both armrests, leaning erratically from side to side, stretching their legs into their neighbor's legroom, listening to music audible despite earphones, and speaking loudly on cell phones, take up a lot of space.



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### Emotional footprint

I may be sitting on the aisle, but if seated next to such people I feel cramped. Do they realize someone is sitting next to them?

Much is made these days of one's "carbon footprint" — a calculation of how much carbon dioxide one adds to the atmosphere through the consumption of fossil fuels (driving a certain car, using a certain amount of electricity, flying a certain number of miles, adjusting the thermostat to a certain temperature, and so forth).

I wonder what would happen if we also took stock of our "emotional footprint" — the effect we have on others by the bluster of our moods, the amount of space we occupy when oblivious to those around us, the volume and pitch of our opinions and complaints, the weight we give to our very presence?

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I have a feeling that if we took stock of that "emotional footprint," we might back off just a bit. In fact, taking such an inventory could be a good Lenten exercise.

### A simple inventory

How often do I make the world around me revolve around me?

Would those with whom I live and work, if I gave them the opportunity to speak, say that I am a force to contend with, a physical and emotional presence not easily accommodated?

Do I say loudly things that would be said better softly?

Do I speak when silence would be more appropriate and more welcome?

Do I take up so much emotional space that my family, friends and co-workers are overwhelmed and intimidated?

Do I sap the energy and mood from a room by my bad-tempered attitude?

Do I hang up the phone harshly, slam the door excessively, push the traffic signal button too fiercely?

I have a hunch that if each of us

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would ask such simple questions, the mood around us would lighten, and a smile would return to our faces.

Why is such a simple inventory appropriate to Lent? The Letter of James offers some hints:

"If anyone does not fall short in speech, he is a perfect man, able to bridle his whole body also. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we also guide their whole bodies. It is the same with ships: even though they are so large and driven by fierce winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot's inclination wishes. In the same way the tongue is a small member and yet has great pretensions.

"Consider how small a fire can set a huge forest ablaze ...

"Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show his works by a good life in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace." (See James 3.)

This Lent, may we resolve to leave a smaller emotional footprint and cultivate peace: peace in our homes, peace at work, peace on the streets, peace in our hearts. But not our peace — God's peace.