

We expect a lot of people – even if they are inexperienced. The Kansas City Royals open their season Monday with the greenest pitching squad in the major leagues. Four starters have an average age of 23 and all five starters combined have won only 21 major league games. The war in Iraq is being fought by people around the same age. Elder statesmen manage them, but the fighting has fallen to youth. Many people get married while they are young, starting a family with only the experience of the one they grew up in. We expect a lot of young people. And often they deliver very well.

In today's first reading, David was specially chosen by God, even though he was the youngest of Jesse's sons. Samuel anointed him to be king over all Israel. David had no experience, but the Spirit of God rushed upon him and his accomplishments became legends.

God still chooses inexperienced people to do a job. Many of us were baptized as infants. We were commissioned to bring the gospel to the world, and we were hopelessly unqualified for this job. God chose us nonetheless. In time we became better Christians. God did not expect us to be skilled at the start.

Whether we've been a Christian for 3 years, 23 years or 83 years, there are times we feel like a rookie. We don't know our bible stories. We can't explain what the church teaches and why. We give in to sin at the pressure of peers. At other times, though, we act like pros. We don't tolerate racist jokes; we say no to sexual temptation; we avoid violent solutions; we make time for God when we could be doing something else.

During Lent we Christians develop our potential. Just this week in our parish we offer adult education on medical ethics, a communal penance service and stations of the cross, while many of our members are attending mass or using Lent prayer books every day. Our elect continue their spiritual preparation for baptism. Lent gives us experience in the Christian life.

Being a good Christian doesn't mean being a pro. It means wanting to do God's will, learning how to do it, trying to do it, and acknowledging our sin when we don't. God chooses those who are inexperienced. We need not be surprised when we fail; we only need to confess our faults and try again. We are chosen as David was, and the Spirit of God is waiting to rush upon us too.

Everybody likes to get a second chance. If you have a disagreement with someone you love, you feel better if you get another chance to make it right. If your business alienates a customer, you appreciate the opportunity to try another time.

One of the greatest second chances in history is retold in today's first reading. God gave Israel a second chance. The princes of Judah, the priests and the people broke the covenant. They worshiped false gods under pressure from unbelieving neighbors. They desecrated the temple in Jerusalem. God sent prophet after prophet, warning the people that terrible things would happen, but they did not listen. In the end, their enemies burnt the temple, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, set its palaces afire and destroyed all its precious objects. Many Israelites were killed by the sword, and others were taken captive to serve as slaves.

But then they got a second chance. The Persians came into power and Cyrus, their king, let the people of Israel go home. Cyrus was a Gentile, not even a Jew. But he fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah, allowing Israel to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple.

Each Lent God gives us all a second chance. We all have days when we behave like ancient Israel: We do not make God a priority; we yield to the temptations that other people set before us; we do not honor the holiness of God's house or the hour we spend at prayer. We disregard the family of God represented in our family and friends, our neighbors and the strangers we meet. We neglect the needy who depend on us. We fail. We do it every year. But God gives us a second chance. No matter what sin we have committed, God is ready to forgive, to let us go home and start over again.

Catholics honor Lent in many ways. Just this week in our parish we offer adult education on medical ethics, a communal penance service and stations of the cross, while many members are attending mass or using Lent prayer books every day. Our elect continue their spiritual preparation for baptism.

At Easter we will celebrate resurrection. When we confess our sins, we realize all the more how much Christ loves us. God loved us not because we are so great, but in spite of our sin. During these final three weeks of Lent, let us turn back from our sin to the God who is always ready to give us a second chance.