

Soon after I graduated from High School in 1971 I came to the realization that I wasn't going to grow much taller than I was then and am now. That wasn't so bad. Other people weren't going to grow taller either. What was bad was that when we all stopped growing I still hadn't achieved the same height as my classmates. When I got to college I was happy to discover there were other short people in the world. Together we learned that there were some advantages to being short: It takes less time to take a shower. You don't have so far to fall. You get great bargains buying clothes in boys' wear. And you're the last one to get rained on in a crowd. We decided we needed an organization just for short people. We called it Height Watchers. We tried to talk people out of growing tall.

It's very human to want to grow. And Lent is a season for growth. Not in height, but in depth. In the depth of our love for God and the depth of our love for each other.

At Mass today we're using two symbols to remind us of the meaning of Lent: ashes and a plant. Ashes to remind us of the dirt from which we're made. A plant to remind us of the growth to which we're called.

When I was a child (even shorter than I was in High School), we had a marvelous tree next to the sidewalk in front of our house. I can't think of plants without thinking of that tree. It was tall where I was short, it was strong where I was weak, it was beautiful where I was ordinary. We couldn't see the top, and its branches stretched from our yard out across the street. Its trunk was so big it took three of us to join hands in a circle around it. But what was most remarkable was its roots. Over the years that tree had become so mighty that its roots burst through the concrete sidewalk, shattering it into pieces. Even concrete couldn't contain the power coming from the life inside that tree.

My brothers and sisters, this Lent O'Hara High School receives a call from God. A call for growth, a call for life so powerful it will burst through whatever threatens to hold us bound. This Lent God wants to strengthen you with faith, to fill your veins with hope, to help you reach out in love.

St. Paul says now is the time, this is the day. What is it that keeps you from loving more deeply? Can you name your fears? Do you know your doubts? Then let this be the time to put them away. Let this be the season we open our hearts, let this be the time we grow.