

First Sunday in Lent

[Genesis 9:8-17](#)

[Psalm 25:1-9](#)

[1 Peter 3:18-22](#)

[Mark 1:9-15](#)



St. Matthew's Cathedral eNews

Christ + Compassion + Community

From the Dean

The Whole Is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

Have you ever wondered why we can't just get the benefits from fruits and vegetables by taking supplements? I mean, wouldn't it be easier just to take pills made up from crushed fruits and vegetables to get the same benefits?

Unfortunately, the answer is "No," and there is a scientific explanation for that.

In 2003, an article published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* proposed that "the additive and synergistic effects of phytochemicals in fruit and vegetables are responsible for their potent antioxidant and anticancer activities, and that the benefit of a diet rich in fruit and vegetables is attributed to the complex mixture of phytochemicals present in whole foods." [*Am J Epidemiol* 1997;146:223-30] In other words, we might not know exactly how it works, but we know it works. Or, to quote the old aphorism: "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." Lenten disciplines are like that. I have chosen to give up coffee, cokes ("soda pop," or "soft drinks," depending on what part of the country you hail from) and desserts. Every Lent I am tempted to cheat. "It won't really matter: it's just one cup of coffee," I rationalize.

But it does matter. No, maybe not on that particular day. And, no, the eternal state of my soul is not at stake if I cheat that one little bit. It is a little thing on that day. But, the spiritual strength, the fortitude that is developed from that healthy self-denial—disciplining the flesh to strengthen the spirit—will deepen my soul in immeasurable ways down the line. Just like mom used to say, "It's good for you to eat your fruits and vegetables." Yes, a Lenten discipline is good for your soul. "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

