

LENT 2017

Back to basics is perhaps the best, or at least the simplest, way to describe how the forty days of Lent should affect the lives of believers. And what are those basics? Jesus himself identifies them in the gospel we hear on Ash Wednesday: “When you **fast**... when you **pray**... when you **give alms**....” Those have long been considered the three “disciplines” of Lent. And discipline is certainly what’s needed if we are to make prayer, fasting and almsgiving as central to our lives as they should be.

Prayer grounds us, not only in the discipline of lent, but in every other dimension of Christian life. Lent offers us the opportunity to examine how prayer is woven throughout each moment of life, from the time we wake to the moment we close our eyes in sleep. Does your day begin with prayer, with words of praise for the gift of another dawn? Are prayers of blessing and thanks integral to every meal of the day? Does a prayer of trust acknowledge the Lord’s presence beside you at home or work or school? Does your day end with petition for the needs of the world and prayers of gratitude for the blessings of the day? Do you pray each Sunday with the community and will you take advantage of other opportunities offered by the parish?

Fasting is the discipline of Lent that helps us make room in our filled and busy lives for the life that really matters: our life with and in the Lord. Fasting in the Christian tradition has most often been associated with food. But all that the law of the Church demands of us now is that we **fast** (eat less) on only two days each year: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday – and only then if we are of a certain age (those regulations can be found elsewhere in this bulletin). On Ash Wednesday and all the Fridays of Lent, we must **abstain** from meat – again, if we are of a certain age. But if that is the only fasting we embrace during Lent, what are we saying about the importance of our life in and with Jesus? There is probably much more that most of us need to do when it comes to fasting. If food does occupy a central place in life, perhaps the Friday evening **Fish Fry** is for you. But what about fasting from TV or the internet? Abstaining from cigarettes or alcohol? Fasting from laziness or busyness? Abstaining from anger, impatience or gossip? The list could go on and on. Decide this week what fasting or abstaining is needed in your life so you can begin to appreciate the life that really matters, in and with the Lord. You can find the official regulations on fasting and abstinence elsewhere in today’s bulletin.

Almsgiving – generosity – is the third discipline of Lent. Like prayer and fasting, it is a basic element of the Christian life year-in and year-out. Almsgiving is **not** what we do with our leftovers, but what we give from the substance of our lives. Almsgiving is what Christians do **before**, not after, their own needs are satisfied; it is the powerful proclamation of trust in the providence of an extravagantly generous and loving God. We’re called to give generously and selflessly, not only to our parish community, but to those beyond our parish boundaries who are in need of our care and concern.

Each one of us must decide just how (and how much) prayer, fasting and almsgiving will mark our Lenten journey. But every parish has a responsibility to provide opportunities for the members of the community to live out the disciplines of Lent. Make some or all of them a part of your Lenten journey this year. The Lenten Calendar you will find in this bulletin should also be a great help in planning your schedule around this pivotal season of the Church Year. The calendar is prepared so that you can conveniently post it in a prominent place in your home during these Lenten days.

PRAYER

Ash Wednesday - March 1st: Masses will be at **8:30a.m.** and **7:00p.m.**, and there will also be the regular **6:30a.m. Communion Service** and an additional **4:00p.m. Prayer Service**. Ashes will be distributed **during** these masses and services, **not** before and **not** after. Please understand that we can't say exactly when the distribution of ashes will take place at each mass or service.

Lenten Mission - Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday, **March 6, 7 & 8** at **7:00p.m.** **Fr. Thomas Dore**, an Archdiocesan priest since 1961, will help us to reflect on what it means for stewardship to be an integral part of our life as Catholic Christians who are **Searching For God**. In addition to the sessions on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Fr. Dore will also preach at all the Masses on March 4 and 5. For more Mission information, see the separate article in today's bulletin.

Daily Mass: Monday thru Friday at **8:30a.m.** and Saturday at **8:00a.m.** There will also be the usual 6:30a.m. Communion Service, Monday thru Saturday, and an additional Lenten Mass each Wednesday at **7:00p.m.**

Friday Way of the Cross: From **March 3 through April 7, at 7:00p.m.**, you are invited to walk with Jesus on his journey to Calvary.

The Sacrament of Penance: In addition to the regular Saturday time for Confessions—4:30 to 5:00p.m. in the Reconciliation Rooms—there will be additional times to celebrate reconciliation. The date for our **Lenten Communal Penance Service** will be announced next weekend, and the final opportunity for confessions before Holy Week begins will be on **Saturday, April 8th**, from 3:30 to 5:00p.m. Please remember that the Sacrament of Penance will not be offered once the Sacred Triduum begins on Holy Thursday evening, April 13th.

FASTING

The **Friday Evening Lenten Fish Fry** here at St. Joseph is a wonderful time to join with other parishioners and with guests from surrounding communities to observe the Friday abstinence from meat, and I certainly hope that the gym will be filled on those nights. But also, look again at the section above on *Fasting* and promise yourself that you will do even **more** during these Lenten days to make room in your life for what's truly nourishing and important.

ALMSGIVING

Once again, the focus of parish giving during these Lenten days will be the **Baby Bottle Project** in recognition of the vital work of supporting expectant mothers and safeguarding the sanctity of life for the most vulnerable in our society—the unborn children who need to be welcomed into this world to enjoy the life that we all share in the Lord. Please take those bottles anytime during Lent and return them either on Passion (Palm) Sunday weekend, **April 8-9**, or at the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, **April 13**.

May this coming Lenten Season be a time of refreshment, renewal and deepened commitment to truly live our baptismal promises in the community of the Church and in a world so very much in need of God's love and mercy.

Fr. Bob