

Letter from the Pastor
February 24th, 2021

LENT 2021

The season of Lent began on Ash Wednesday, February 17th. Lent is a time for us to reflect upon what we can do or perhaps do differently this year to make this a fruitful and joyful season. The primary concept to grasp is that Lent is not about “self-improvement” so to speak, but rather about “soul improvement “. Change or sacrifice **can** be joyful when the primary concept of these actions shifts from the thought of self-denial to the idea of self-renewal. However, this can only happen when self is no longer the focus but rather Christ and Others in our lives and in our souls.

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent: the liturgical season marked by increased prayer, fasting (self-denial), almsgiving, and acts of mercy. It is immediate preparation for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery: the suffering, death, and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ; and remote preparation for citizenship in Heaven – to be with God forever.

Though it is not a day upon which we are obliged to attend Holy Mass, many people did come to church for the celebration of the Eucharist and ashes. Many people also come for the Liturgy of the Word prayer services and ashes, as well. These liturgies at which we gather remind us that though we have been redeemed by the saving action of Christ, we are always a people who need God’s mercy. We are not yet “saved,” as some Christians believe, claiming that they no longer need to have concern about their salvation. Our belief as Catholics is that our salvation is worked out, day-by-day, with our ultimate reliance upon the mercy of God who wills to save us. The state of our soul when we leave this life **is** particularly important.

Like everything this year, Ash Wednesday was different from the way most of us usually experience it. We came forward to receive the Blessed ashes on the top of the head and not the forehead. This is an ancient way to receive the ashes and is the practice in Rome and in Europe and many other places throughout the world. Here in the United States, it has not been the usual custom. The popes and all the priests in Rome have always received the ashes in that manner, even before the pandemic. For them, nothing would have been different from the way they usually receive the ashes.

Some traditional Lenten prayer practices in which we may wish to participate could be attending Mass daily, or perhaps an extra day during the week, if we are

able; praying Morning Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours before Mass might be included, as well. Another is the Way of the Cross devotion, made either communally or privately. We will have the Way of the Cross each Friday of Lent. Perhaps we can try to pray the Rosary or the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy regularly. By no means is this list exhaustive.

Being a materially blessed society, most of us have food of some variety readily available to us. Therefore, fasting is one of those actions not many of us like to do. On occasion we must fast if we are having medical procedures done or blood tests taken, and the complaining that accompanies this can be tremendous. However, denying ourselves something we need to live, but restricting the quantity is do-able, especially when it comes to food. When our stomach growls, it is a reminder of how much we are blessed, and how so many others do without on a regular basis. It also reminds us of our total dependence upon God, who provides us with the sustenance of life. If we are always concerned with keeping our bellies full, not only do we need larger clothes, but we become deaf to the cry of the poor and hungry in body and in spirit, and inadvertently make our personal comfort a number one priority. There is an old proverb: *Fast your sin, not your bin.*”

Likewise, our charity can always grow. The sharing of our time and material resources with and for the benefit of others will open us to be more grateful for whatever we have and help us to be humbler in the sight of God. Hence, the added benefit will be a better “self”. May our Lenten sacrifices bear the fruit of a soul united to Christ crucified.

During Lent we will have the Stations of the Cross and Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament on each Friday at 7.00pm. Please make every effort to walk with Our Lord as he carried the Cross

Please make a Holy Lent and try to instill into your children the importance of doing penance. How pleased is Our Lord when the little ones give up candy or cookies for love of Him.

PARISH FINANCES

As everyone is aware, the last year has brought so many challenges to us. Our little ones have been unable to go to school, and so many have lost their employment. Weddings and so many family celebrations have been put on hold. Here at St. Paul’s

we have had many financial challenges. Obviously, our weekly collection has decreased with fewer attending Mass. We also could not have our two annual fund raisers, the Annual Golf Outing, and the Gala Casino Night. We rely heavily upon these fund raisers to meet our everyday expenses. Our Christmas collection was down this year by over \$31,000 from last year. That is a collection we rely upon. In addition, our expenses have increased. The Church is cleaned and sanitized after every Mass which has added to our expenses. This has been the first year in which we failed to reach our assigned goal. It is the first year we finish in the red as to our proposed income and expenses.

Therefore, I am asking everyone to be generous and to continue to support the parish as you have done in the past. Perhaps some would even consider remembering their parish in their wills. When I see how many colleges and Catholic High Schools have large endowments, I often think how nice it would be for our people to also remember the parish where they are weekly fed with the Blessed Eucharist.

TWO LENTEN MEDITATIONS

As we begin Lent, I would like to present for your meditation two charming stories which I have presented before but which always teach us important lessons for Lent. May we use our speech in Lent not in complaining and tearing down our neighbor and our parish but rather in what is uplifting May we hear no gossip nor repeat any gossip. May we have preserved from the critical spirit whose origin is the devil and which leads to the death of the soul. Here are the two stories. Enjoy them!

THE MAN THE BOY AND THE DONKEY

A man and his son headed to market with their donkey. A man on a horse passed them and asked, "*Why aren't you riding your donkey?*"

The man placed his son on the donkey, and they continued on their way. They passed by a family working in their fields. A young girl said, "*Look at that lazy boy riding while his father is walking.*"

The man told his son to get off the donkey, and he climbed on. They passed a group of women and one said, "*What a selfish man, making his son walk while he rides.*"

The man asked his son to climb on the donkey with him. They passed a traveler on the road, who said, "*That poor donkey is carrying too much weight.*"

Not knowing what to do, the man and his son began to carry the donkey. But the donkey kicked so violently they released their hold, and the donkey ran away.

ST. PHILIP NERI AND THE GOSSIP OF ROME

St. Philip Neri lived in Italy in the early sixteenth century. After many years as a lay apostle, caring for the sick and teaching young people, especially boys in street gangs, about the love of Jesus, Philip became a priest. One day, a woman who was notorious in all of Rome for being a gossip went to confession to Father Philip. For her penance, Philip told her to carry her feather pillow to the windiest hill in Rome, cut it open and shake out all the feathers, and then return to him. The penitent did as she was told. When she returned, Philip told the woman to go back to the hill and collect all the feathers that she had shaken out. "*But Father!*" she exclaimed, "*The wind has carried away all the feathers by now! It would be impossible for me to collect them again.*" Saint Philip replies, "*That is what has happened to all the rumors and gossip you have spread around Rome. You can never take back all those idle words you have spoken.*"

These are two important lessons for us all in this holy time.

A Blessed Lent!
Buona Quaresima!

In Jesus and Mary,
Monsignor James F. Pereda