

FROM THE PASTOR

MARCH 19, 2023

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT – LAETARE SUNDAY

HOLY LENT

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary His Most Holy Mother! For our meditation of today I would like to continue to set before us the grace filled season of Lent which began on Ash Wednesday, February 22nd. Today we come to Mid-Lent and the Sunday, which is called *Laetare Sunday*, the Sunday of Rejoicing. We rejoice because Easter is so near, and today the priest puts away the somber violet color of Lent and is instead vested in the color Rose, the color of the dawn which reminds us that soon that Day of Days will be here, the day which knows no night, our Beloved Easter.

On Ash Wednesday we all came forward to be signed with the sacred ashes. These were the ashes of the palm from Palm Sunday 2022. Thus, we are immediately drawn to Our Lord's passion and death.

In the early centuries of the Church, penitents would not enter the Church building. They stood at the porch of the Church covered in ashes as a sign of their repentance. Although their sins were unknown and confessed in private, nonetheless their penance was done in public throughout the whole of Lent. As the centuries progressed soon all the faithful wished to be penitents during Lent so they all began to wear the ashes.

In a certain sense we still have a vestige of the ancient custom of the public penance. I am always so impressed by the First Confession Ceremony here at St. Paul's. Mrs. Shannon, and all the teachers and aides, have done a wonderful service in preparing the children. When our little ones make their First Confession at St. Paul's, after being absolved they pray their penance kneeling at the altar rail, in full view of everyone. Although their confession is private, they publicly perform their penance so that all can see their good example. Whenever we stand in line to go to confession, we, too, are public penitents. How pleased Our Lord is with this humility, for we stand so that all may see that we are sinners. The late Cardinal O'Connor, the former Archbishop of New York, always made his own confession at St. Francis Church on 31st Street. Many of our own parishioners have confessed there many times. There is a special confessional at St. Francis where priests may go to make their own confession in that Church. There is a sign that says in Latin *Confessionale Sacerdotum*, meaning Confessional for priests. But Cardinal O'Connor always chose to stand in line with all the others going to confession. He used to say that he wanted all the faithful to see that their Archbishop was also a sinner and needed to do penance.

And so, in Lent we try to order our souls and, with God's grace, drive from them anything that can be a stumbling block in our great desire to grow in holiness. In the words of St. Josémaría Escrivá, we say to God Our Lord in prayer, *Lord take from me anything that would take you from me!* As we came up to receive the Blessed Ashes, we hear those familiar words which we must listen to again and again...*Memento homo, Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return...* Despite

this reminder we sometimes forget that without God we are nothing. Without God, all that remains of man's greatness is that little pile of dust and ashes, in a dish, at one side of the altar, on Ash Wednesday. It is what the Church marks us with on our forehead, as though with our own substance.

God wants us to detach ourselves from the things of this world and return to him. He wants us to abandon sin, which makes us grow older and die spiritually, and for us to return to the fount of life and joy. Jesus Christ himself is the most sublime grace of the whole of Lent. It is He who presents Himself to us in all the wonder and simplicity of the Gospel.

Lent is the time for the three-fold spiritual program of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Lent is a time of prayer. We should all make every effort to pray during Lent. It is time once again to take out the Holy Rosary, perhaps forgotten in a drawer, and pray the Rosary, even as a family, if possible.

Lent is a time of fasting penance: Our Lord is looking for a contrite heart within us, a heart that acknowledges its weaknesses and sins and is prepared to disencumber itself of them. God wants from us genuine sorrow for our sins which we will manifest, above all, by going to sacramental confession, and by doing small deeds of mortification and penance out of love. For us, conversion means seeking God's pardon and strength in the Sacrament of penance. This is the way to start again and improve each day. Please refer to the Pastor's Letter of two weeks ago to find an easy examination of conscience.

Lent is a time of almsgiving: During Lent we try to give of ourselves for the poor, who are Christ Himself in the world today. Some may have great wealth, but, nevertheless, be poor in the sense that their souls are in need. We should do our best to live the sufferings of the poor, but also give our own time to the elderly and the lonely. Sometimes the greatest gift to someone could be a smile and a kind word. All Christians can practice almsgiving – not only the affluent and powerful, but those too who are not well off or who are themselves poor; in this way people who are unequal in their capacity to give alms are equal in the love and affection with which they give.

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

Everyone is most cordially invited to our annual St. Patrick/St. Joseph Pancake Breakfast on Sunday March 19th immediately after the 10.30 Mass.

In Jesus and Mary,

Monsignor James F. Pereda