

Our Lady of Victories Church

(serving Harrington Park, River Vale and the Pascack/Northern Valley)
150 Harriot Avenue, Harrington Park, New Jersey

www.olvhp.org

WELCOME

To the Parish Family of
OUR LADY OF VICTORIES
(THE LITTLE CHURCH WITH THE BIG HEART)

COME WORSHIP WITH US

Rev. Wojciech B. Jaskowiak
Pastor



ASH WEDNESDAY February 26, 2020

Mass Schedule

6:15am, 8:00am, 12:00noon,
3:30pm, 6:00pm Latin, 7:00pm,
8:00pm Spanish

Ash Wednesday is a day of both Fast and Abstinence. On this particular day only one (1) full meal is permitted, and no meat is permitted. Those between the ages of 18 and 59 are obliged to fast.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS during Lent

MONDAYS: 4:15PM – in Church - led by CCD Children
FRIDAYS: 11:30AM & 7:00PM – in Church

SPECIAL ROSARY meditating the 7 sorrows of Mary

WEDNESDAYS: 3:00PM before Statue of Blessed Mother outside.

SUNDAY, February 23, 2020 A.D.



2020 LENTEN REGULATIONS

The days of both Fast and Abstinence during Lent are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. If possible, the fast on Good Friday is continued until the Easter Vigil (on Holy Saturday night) as the “paschal fast” to honor the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus, and to prepare ourselves to share more fully and to celebrate more readily His Resurrection. The other Fridays of Lent are days of Abstinence.

On a day of Fast, only one (1) full meal is permitted, and **two (2) smaller meals, which, if added together, would not exceed the main meal in quantity.** Those between the ages of 18 and 59 are obliged to fast.

On a day of Abstinence, no meat may be eaten. Those who have reached the age of 14 are obliged by the law of abstinence.

The obligation to observe the laws of Fast and abstinence “substantially”, or as a whole, is a serious obligation.

The Fridays of the year, outside of Lent, are designated as days of penance, but each individual may substitute for the traditional abstinence from meat some other practice of voluntary self-denial as penance.

The time for fulfilling the Paschal Precept (Easter Duty*) extends from the **First Sunday of Lent, March 1, 2020 to the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity, June 7, 2020.**

*Canon 920, §1. *All the faithful, after they have been initiated into the Most Holy Eucharist, are bound by the obligation of receiving Communion at least once a year.*



Phone: 201-768-1706
Address: 81 Lynn St.
Email: olvrectory.hp@gmail.com

OLV Rectory
201-768-3962

Religious Education
201-768-1400
155 Parkway
olvhpccd@gmail.com

OLV Convent
201-768-1705
145 Parkway

Fr. Wojciech's Corner

Over the arches of the triple doorway of the Cathedral of Milan there are three inscriptions. One is a beautifully carved wreath of roses, and beneath it the words, "All that pleases is but for a moment." Another is a sculptured Cross with these words below: "All that troubles is but for a moment." And over the central doorway these words are inscribed ...

"That only is important which is eternal."

This coming Wednesday we start the season of **Lent** with **Ash Wednesday**. Marked with ashes we want to start our return, our U-Turn to the Lord not only from our wayward ways, but also in our wayward hearts and minds. That is why a time of Lent is a time of *metanoia*, a Greek word for a change of mentality not only change of some habits on Fridays and other days. The time of Lent is not a time to prove to ourselves how many days we can do without... Otherwise, glory would be ours. The time of Lent is rather a *teshuva*, Hebrew for return to God and to our neighbor. We will hear the prophet Hosea, return to me says the Lord with your **WHOLE** heart. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are only means for this return to happen; they are no ends in themselves. They help us give up our sins. What good is it if I give up food and grumble all the time about how hungry I am. I am sorry for all those who promise to themselves too much and within a few days already break their promises. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are like three supporting columns of Lent. Each one of the three gets its best when accompanied by the other two according to St. Peter Chrysologus. A great Lenten devotion Stations of the Cross. It always amazes me that the Stations include **THREE FALLS** of JESUS, not three accomplishments; but yes, after each fall He gets up. What a great way to learn about our daily cross-roads, about our cross-life stations by meditating on **HIS STATIONS**. Please see the schedule. Once helped by prayer, fasting and almsgiving, a good confession is a concrete way to return. I encourage **EVERYONE** to make a good confession this Lent. Return to a book of saints or fathers of the desert during this desert time; it is a great way to live Lent. Read an Imitation of Christ Book - great to fall in love with Jesus again. Lack of Alleluia and lack of meat on Fridays are only ways to submit our bodies (*we always have 100 reasons not to*) and remember, we are in a waiting time for Easter with excitement. Fasting to feast. The Purple color constantly helps us to remember. It is a color that breaks the darkness before the sun comes up; let me put it this way, before **THE SON COMES UP** (from the tomb). Amazing. Lets get internal to get eternal.

On **March 27th** we will have a special **bus trip** as a way of getting away from our daily activities to be alone with the Lord and His Mother. See details on page 4. Also, our **pilgrimage to Rome October 2-9** is taking shape. We will have our first important meeting this Monday at 6:30PM in lower church. *Start working on your Italian.*

I wish to all to remember: "The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." (Marcel Proust)

this Lent

LIVE MORE INTERNAL LIFE TO GET THE ETERNAL

Abba Macarius the Great said to the brother (monks) at Scetis, when he dismissed the assembly, 'Flee, my brothers.' One of the old men asked him, 'Where could we flee to beyond the desert?' He put his finger on his lips and said, 'Flee that,' and he went into his cell, shut the door and sat down. - **Abba Macarius-Desert Father**

Lenten Disciplines

The Lenten discipline consists of three separate parts:

1. **Corporal or External Fast**, including the abstinence from certain foods, drinks and amusements, i.e. music, and parties during Lent. These points of fast should be stressed today especially with the mania of entertainment besetting our society;
2. **Spiritual or Internal Fast**, which consists of abstinence from "all evil" – sin. St. John Chrysostom taught that the "value of fasting consists not so much in abstinence from food but rather in withdrawal from sinful practices." And St. Basil the Great explains: "Turning away from all wickedness means keeping our tongue in check, restraining our anger, suppressing evil desires, and avoiding all gossip, lying and swearing. To abstain from these things – herein lies the true value of fast!"
3. **Spiritual Change** achieved by the practice of virtues and good works must be the main objective of our fasting. The Fathers of the Church insisted that during Lent the faithful attend the Lenten church services and daily Mass.

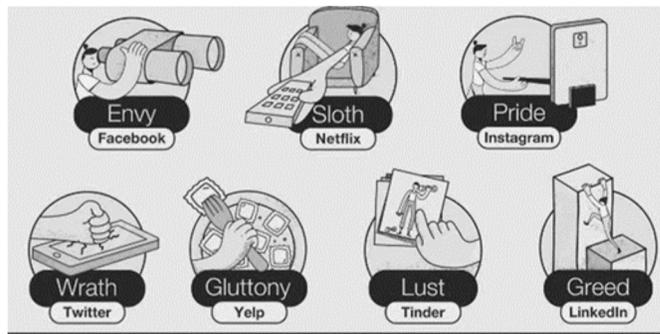
ARE YOU AWARE?

This past week an Alabama lawmaker authored a bill that would require each man to undergo a vasectomy at age 50 or "after the birth of his third biological child, whichever comes first." Under Rep. Rolanda Hollis' proposal, men also would have to pay for the procedure themselves. In a statement, Rep. Hollis said her proposal is meant to "neutralize" the abortion ban bill and "send a message that men should not be legislating what women do with their bodies."

In 2019, Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey signed the state's controversial abortion ban into law. The ban made it a felony for doctors in the state to perform abortions in all cases except where the mother's life is in danger. The ban has since been blocked by a federal judge, and a resulting lawsuit is pending. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/alabama-lawmaker-proposes-bill-requiring-men-vasectomies/story?id=69008081> Check our corner each week for news and local/ regional events and make the time to stand up for LIFE.

Lent isn't about what external temptations we want to give up. Lent is more an internal journey of discovery and oneness with God. Lent is to go beyond the earthly. **Roger Lopez, OFM**

HE gave UP HIS SON He asks us Give UP SINS this LENT



CCD Corner

We welcome our students back to CCD classes this Sunday and Monday. This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday and marks the beginning of the season of Lent. So, what is Lent? It is a time of preparation for the coming of Easter which includes fasting, repentance and prayer. Many people "give something up" for Lent. God gave up His very Son for us. Another suggestion would be to "do something more" for Lent. We encourage you to discuss with your children how your family can do something more during this Lenten season. It can be as simple as helping with an extra chore at home or taking the time to say some extra prayers or say something positive to a different person each day. Maybe as a family to read lives of saints of a given day. Just google saint of the day. What an inspiration for the days in Lent and for a better life. There are many ways to do a **little more**.

There will be a Mass at 3:30PM in the church that is perfect for students to attend and receive ashes. In addition, every Monday at 4:15PM in the Church we will have Stations of the Cross led by CCD students, come learn how to live your crosses meditating how He did it. Good Lent to all.

Pray for Those in the Military

US Army

Captain Ben Clemente
RRT Specialist James Crumb
Specialist Peter Dippolito
Major Michael Franson
Sergeant First Class Charles Greene
Captain Shawn Linn
Lieutenant Gigi McElroy
Colonel John McLaughlin
Captain John G. Miele

US Air Force

Chief Master Sergeant Shawn Llewellyn

US Marine Corps.

Lance Corporal Shanna Bennett
Corporal Matthew Brady
1st Lieutenant Ryan Colomeo
Lance Corporal Thomas Iafraite
Corporal Joseph Levine

US Navy

Lt. Commander Julia Cheringal
Ensign Jon Clemente
Lieutenant Joseph Jaeger
Lieutenant Andrew Jaeger
OS2 Daniel T. LoVecchio

Prayer for the Safety of Soldiers

Almighty and eternal God, those who take refuge in You will be glad and forever will shout for joy. Protect these soldiers as they discharge their duties. Protect them with the shield of Your strength and keep them safe from all evil and harm. May the power of Your love enable them to return home in safety, that with all who love them, they may ever praise You for Your loving care. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Pray for Our Sick

PRAY FOR OUR SICK: Please Pray in the name of JESUS, the Healer, that the sick of the Parish may be restored to health and all those who assist and care for the sick will be given the strength to continue God's Will: baby Cordelia, baby Emmet Fischer, baby Jonathan, Richard Bolton, Robert Brawley, Dominic Carini, Carolanne Carini, Sal Cenicola, Helen Choma, Kevin Columbo, Marie D'Ascenzo, Maryann Dean, Lorraine Degerdon, Isabelle DeLeonibus, Vincent DePaola, Marge Devitt, Carl Falasca, Jay Filippone, Marie Filippone, Mary Foley, Rich Goldfarb, Leslie Handler, Amy Hartwell, Peter Kellar, Milan Krupa, Mary Lowe, James McGarry, Robert Milli, Gianna Moscatello, John Pal, Joyanna Peros, John Peterson Jr, Marie Piazza, Terry Pommert, Canice Prince, Louise Ricciardi, Vincent Ricciardi, Veronica Romanchuk, Beth Sacco, Mike Tobia, Eric Unger, Brian, Carla, Chris, Christina, Dierdre, Edward, Elba, Fiona, Jennifer, Joann, Lisa, Liz, Lucas, Lynn, Michael, Patrick, Paul, Peter, Robert, Sean, Sharon.

HOMEBOUND

If you or anyone you know is homebound – even for a short duration of time - please contact the rectory so I or an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion can be scheduled to bring the Eucharist to the sick and homebound. Let us not wait until the death of someone to look for a priest.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

We are constantly under attack and tempted by the forces of EVIL. Every Tuesday afternoon from 2:00-3:15PM members of OLV parish meet and pray the Marian Novena which focuses on this daily battle. All are welcome. Join us.

CONSECRATE your LENT adoring the Lord

Thursday Holy Hour at 7PM & Friday 12:30PM-3PM.

When great masterpieces of art are restored, layers and layers of the overlay are removed before the real painting is found. So it is with our sins. We ask God to take off one coat after another of sin and pretense until His real image is visible again. - Mother Mary Francis from A Time of Renewal

THINK ABOUT IT

When something happens to you, good or bad, consider what it means. There's a purpose to life's events, to teach you how to laugh more or not to cry too hard. You can't make someone love you; all you can do is be someone who can be loved. The rest is up to the person to realize your worth.

Mass Intentions

Monday, February 24 – St. Ethelbert-King of Kent, England

8:00 Marie Landers R/b Margaret Brandes
12:00 Gerald Hallisey R/b Rae Rinaldi

Tuesday, February 25 - St. Tarasius - Patriarch of Constantinople

8:00 Anna Lucia Arias R/b Maria Arias
12:00 Irene Louise Ricciardi R/b Bruce Michael Ricciardi

ASH WEDNESDAY, February 26 – St. Victor, Hermit

6:15 Clare Burruano R/b Mike and Maria Hellrigel
8:00 Patrick Henderson R/b the Bland Family
12:00 Mary Turnbull R/b Rita McNamara
3:30 Mary Fallon
6:00 Latin Sr. Ann Regina IHM R/b Family
7:00 Special Intention
8 Spanish Souls in Purgatory

Thursday, February 27 – St. Leander of Seville, Bishop

8:00 Tawanna V. Anderson R/b the Algeria Family
12:00 Luciano Minetti R/b David and Donna Hansen

Friday, February 28 – St. Hilary, Pope

8:00 Thomas Izzo R/b the Izzo Family
12:00 Intentions of Ryan Devir R/b Lisa Unanue

Saturday, February 29 - St. Oswald, Bishop

8:00 Frank Fanto R/b Stefano and Andrew Pappalardo
12:00 Michael Giotta R/b Ann Giotta
4:00 Ronald Paffenroth R/b Cathy and Gary Abbate
5:00 Mr. and Mrs. Eddie Milano R/b the DelGrande Family

Sunday, March 1 - St. David, Bishop-Patron of Wales

7:30 Walter P. Koval Jr. R/b John Walsh
8:15 Intentions of Araceli Cabral R/b Yoly Detrinidad
9:30 Tom Giuliano R/b OLV Choir
10:45 John M. Carloni R/b the McAuley Family
12:00 Charlotte and Thomas Kerrigan R/b Steve Kerrigan
1:00 People of the Parish
6:00 Michael Bellizzi R/b Cathy and Gary Abbate
7:00 Anthony D. Ponte R/b Stefano Pappalardo

Sanctuary Memorials

The Sanctuary Lamp burns this week for the intentions and healing of Christine Capone, r/b Domenic and Marcela Cafarella.

The Bl. Virgin Mary Votive Lamp burns this week for the repose of the soul of Carol Curcio-Mertz, r/b Liz Gulfo

The St. Joseph Votive Lamp burns this week for the souls in Purgatory.

Sanctuary Offerings

The Bread and Wine, Bl. Virgin Mary and St. Joseph Votive Lamps, and Sanctuary Lamp in Church may be dedicated on a weekly basis. And the Altar Flowers may be memorialized. Call OLV rectory for information 201-768-1706.

New to the area? If you are, why not join our ever-growing Parish family. Stop by the Rectory any weekday and meet Maria and register to become a member of the OLV family.

PLEASE, if you change your address or phone number, let us know! STEWARDSHIP My Family—My Parish—My Responsibility

Did you ever notice that the price of a movie is now over \$10, milk is almost \$3 a gallon, and there is no longer such a thing as penny candy? The price of everything around us has increased, but has your weekly donation to the Church ever increased? That one dollar donation doesn't buy as much as it once did. As your expenses increase, so do those of the Church, but we rely on your generosity to meet our expenses. Please be generous. Thank you.

Upcoming TRIPS

OLV - Lent - Bus Trip

to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Shrine-Middletown, NY

Day of Recollection - Friday, March 27

Depart OLV 8:00AM - Return approx. 4:00PM.

Day includes Lenten reflection by Carmelite priest, opportunity for Confession, Mass, Stations of the Cross. Bring a brown bag lunch.

Free will offering accepted. Call OLV Rectory to sign-up 201-768-1706.

Arrivederci OLV, Ciao Roma

Interested in our parish pilgrimage to Italy this October? Join us at an information meeting this Monday, February 24, at 6:30PM in the lower church.

2020 Annual Appeal Shining the Light of Christ

Your gift supports ministries and programs including *Proclaiming the Gospel* (Family Life Office, Women's and Men's Commissions, international Missions), *Passing on the Faith* (Catechetical Office, Youth and Young Adult Ministry), *Caring for the Poor and Vulnerable* (Catholic Charities, hospital and Prison Chaplaincy, Ministry with Persons with Disabilities, Respect Life Office), *Forming Future Priests and supporting retired clergy* (seminarian education, priest health care, continuing education and formation for priests). Our 2020 parish goal is \$58,285.

2020 Wedding Anniversary Masses

The Archdiocese of Newark is preparing the annual tradition of honoring those couples who will celebrate five, twenty-five and fifty years of Christian marriage in 2020. Couples deserving of such recognition are urged to participate. These liturgies will be celebrated at 3:00pm at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark:

Sunday, April 19 - 5 & 25 years / Sunday, May 3 - 50 years

Please call the OLV Rectory to register at 201-768-1706.

Gianna Center for Women

The St. Peter's Gianna Center in New Brunswick is dedicated to helping women with reproductive issues, especially infertility and various gynecologic disorders. This Center works within the moral tenets of the Catholic Church's teaching on reproductive healthcare, but is to women of all faiths. For more information go to www.saintpetershcs.com/giannacenter.

SHUT OUT other sounds this LENT

Listen to God on Relevant Radio - 1430 AM

Tune in to Relevant Radio, the largest Catholic radio network in the nation. Its local station 1430AM, has fast become a growing Catholic radio presence here in the Archdiocese of Newark and the greater New York/Tri-State area, sharing news and insights into our Catholic Faith. Listen online at www.relevantradio.com and on the FREE mobile app.

LENT – SACRIFICE – CLOTHING BINS

Lent is a time of sacrifice in order to bring us closer to Christ. As we do so, we become more charitable. Would you be willing to sacrifice your time and efforts to go through your closet and donate any used clothing, small appliances, shoes, linens, sheets, towels, stuffed animals, novels, and children's books to the Catholic Charities clothing bin? If you do, you have made the connection and you have moved closer to Christ. Thank you.

Sexual Misconduct

The Archdiocese takes very seriously any and all allegations of sexual misconduct members of the clergy, Religious and lay staff of the Archdiocese. We encourage anyone with knowledge of an act of sexual misconduct to inform us immediately so that we may take appropriate action to protect others and provide support to victims of sexual abuse. Individuals who wish to report an allegation of sexual misconduct may do so by calling the Archdiocesan Office and Youth Protection at 201-407-3256.

DEAR PARENTS

It is a genuine cause for alarm that so many children who attend Catholic Grammar Schools and High Schools or our Parish Religious Education Classes (CCD) **DO NOT** go to Mass on the weekends. **ALL the MONEY, TIME and COMMITMENT** to our Catholic Religious Education is **WASTED** if **PARENTS** fail to impress upon their children the importance of worshipping on Sunday. **Also, Confirmation is NOT GRADUATION from attending Mass. There is no substitute for fulfilling your Sunday Mass obligation.**

FOUR WORDS

A king called all of his wise men and counselors together for a meeting. He addressed them and said, "I want you to go and think, read, and research. Consult the wisest and most learned men in the land. Spare no expense." "I want you to find the ONE statement that will get me through all situations in life. Whether I am on top of the world or in the pits, find that statement." "Find me a Mountain Wings Moment statement." "I don't want to learn long and complicated philosophies. I want one simple statement. Find it or write it; I don't care, just bring me the statement." The men left and consulted for months. They finally returned and handed the King a scroll. The King unrolled the scroll. On it was written four words. "THIS TOO SHALL PASS". That was it.

The wise men explained. When you are on top of the world, that is but a fleeting moment, things change, always remember, this too shall pass. When you are in the pits, all nights are followed by day, at your lowest moments remember also, this too shall pass. All external circumstances and material things change. No matter what your circumstances, remember, THIS TOO SHALL PASS!

The wise men reminded the great King that this would get him through his earthly things, but the truly wise knew there were things beyond this earth and life ... things that were eternal. True wisdom, they reminded the King, was in the ability to recognize the fleeting temporal things of the material world from the truly eternal things. "O Great King", they said, "Most of the things that you worry or gloat about are temporary, and our four words apply." For most of your situations...THIS TOO SHALL PASS!

WHEN LIGHTING A CANDLE

When you light a candle for another person or for your very personal intention always remember that the candle prolongs your prayer. As long as the candle is burning, your prayer is rising to God. Like the candle is spreading light and warmth, so you can imagine that with your prayer, your love and the love of God is flowing towards the person for whom you pray. Your prayer makes the life of the person brighter and warmer. Your prayer brightens your vision so that with greater confidence you can look upon the person and see with the eyes of the Love of God. When you pray for a personal intention light will enter the darkness; hope fills you. You may trust that God Himself looks upon you and HIS merciful love overshadows you.

A candle radiates a gentle light. In the dim light of a candle you will look upon people and on your own life with gentleness. In calmness you will also be able to look at your own faults to have them healed by God.

KIDZ KORNER ANSWERS

1. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert fasting right after his baptism and before his public ministry.
2. Barabbas.
3. Golgotha.
4. Two thieves.
5. St. Paul.

Baby Items Collection February 22/23

The annual Mother/Child collection benefits New Hope Pregnancy Center. New Hope helps first-time single mothers financially, physically, emotionally, and educationally. Items most needed: Newborn diapers size 3 diapers, 4, 5, and 6; Girls one-piece outfit with feet in sizes 3-6 months, 6-9 months, 9-12 months; Boys one-piece outfit with feet in sizes 0-3 months, 3-6 months, 6-9 months, 9-12 months; Girls long-sleeve shirt and pants in sizes 24 months, 3T, 4T; A&D ointment, baby wash and shampoo and Shop-Rite gift cards in amounts of \$10, \$15, and \$20. *Sponsored by OLV Social Concerns and Rosary Society.*

40 DAYS FOR LIFE

There will be a modified vigil for the 40 Days for Life in Hackensack this Lent on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (days when abortions are performed), 7AM-2PM at 10 Zabriskie St., Hackensack. Vigil will start on Thursday, February 27, and end on Palm Sunday, April 5. Please consider giving one hour per week during Lent to join us in prayer. To sign-up please contact Margaret at 201-805-0937.

Women's Commission Day of Reflection

Saturday, March 7, 8AM-4PM, Cost: \$30, Seton Hall University. This year's theme is "Alive in Christ". English track speakers: *Sr. Bethany Madonna, Sisters of Life*; Colleen Kelly Rayner, a Catholic Lay Evangelist; Dianne M. Traflet, Assoc. Dean for Graduate Studies and Administration. Spanish track speakers: Kathia Arango director of the Office for Hispanic Catholics, Archdiocese of Philadelphia; Yamilka Genao Assoc. Director of Hispanic Family Pastoral, Archdiocese of Newark. Featuring Kelvin Joel Ministry, Catholic singer-songwriter whose music carries a positive, hopeful message. Visit www.rcan.org/alive-in-christ-2020.

Stephanie Cywinski-O'Brien Scholarship

For the 13th consecutive year, student scholarships are available through the Stephanie Cywinski-O'Brien Trust. Applications are now being accepted from parish 7th and 8th grade students attending a Catholic grammar school, as well as Freshmen, Sophomores and Juniors (secondary consideration) attending a Catholic high school and continuing their education at a Catholic school. Applications and eligibility requirements are available at the parish office and/or on the parish website. Applications are due April 10 with decisions due on or about May 1.

Make a DIFFERENCE

What happens when 1.6 million men believe they can make a difference - they actually do. Join the Knights of Columbus. Last year they volunteered over 58 million hours to help the needy and better their communities. They raised over \$125 million for charities and local churches. For info call Mike 201-784-2201.

A Little Humor...

The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic elementary school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The nun made a note, and posted on the apple tray: "Take only ONE. God is watching." Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A child had written a note, "Take all you want. God is watching the apples."

A Kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's work. As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was. The girl replied, "I'm drawing God." The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like." Without missing a beat, or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."

KIDZ KORNER

1. Where did we get the idea for the Lenten 40-day fast?
2. Pontius Pilate set what prisoner free instead of Jesus?
3. What was the name of the hill on which Jesus was crucified?
4. Jesus was crucified between whom?
5. Who witnessed the stoning of Stephen the Martyr?

ANSWERS ON PAGE FOUR.

BLESSED BE JESUS CHRIST!

Sign of the Cross - SIGN OF GLORY

Catholics often make the Sign of the Cross casually, just as a nice gesture for beginning and ending their prayers. But, when we learn to take this act seriously, signing ourselves frequently with faith and reverence, remarkable results can take place. We find ourselves doing measurably better in our Christian life: Praying with more passion, resisting our bad inclinations more effectively, and relating to others more kindly.

The Sign of the Cross, after all, is not merely a pious gesture. It is a powerful prayer, a sacramental of the Church. Holy Scripture, Church, Fathers and saints, and Catholic teaching offer perspectives on the Sign of the Cross that reveal why making it opens us to life transforming graces. Once we grasp them, we can make the gesture with more faith and experience its great blessings.

A MINI-CREED:

The Sign of the Cross is a profession of Faith in God as He has revealed Himself. It serves as an abbreviated form of the Apostles' Creed. Touching our forehead, breast and shoulders (and in some cultures, our lips as well), we declare our belief in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. We are announcing our faith in what God has done: the creation of all things, the redemption of humanity from sin and death, and the establishment of the Church which offers new life to all. When we Sign ourselves, we are making ourselves aware of God's presence and opening ourselves to His action in our lives. That much alone would be enough to transform us spiritually, wouldn't it? But there is much, much more!

A Mark of Discipleship:

At Baptism, the Lord claimed us as His own by marking us with the Sign of the Cross. Now, when we Sign ourselves, we are affirming our loyalty to Him. By tracing the Cross on our bodies, we are denying that we belong to ourselves and declaring that we belong to Him alone (see Lk. 9:23). The Church Fathers used the same word for the Sign of the Cross that the ancient world employed to indicate ownership. The same word named a shepherd's brand on his sheep, a general's tattoo on his soldiers, a householder's mark on his servants, and the Lord's mark on His disciples. Signing ourselves is recognition that we are Christ's sheep and can count on His tender care. We are His soldiers, commissioned to work with Him in advancing His Kingdom on earth. And His servants, dedicated to doing whatever He tells us.

A Two-Edged Move Against The Devil:

When the devil watched Jesus die on the Cross, he mistakenly believed he had won a great victory. But, the Lord surprised him with an ignominious defeat (see 1 Cor. 2:8). From the first Easter morning through the present the Sign of the Cross makes the devil cower and flee. On one level, then, making the Sign is a defensive move, declaring our inviolability to the devil's influence. But more importantly, the Sign is also an offensive weapon, helping us reclaim with Christ all that Satan lost at the Cross. It announces our cooperation with Jesus in the indomitable advance of the Kingdom of God against the kingdom of darkness.

A Victory Over The Flesh:

In the New Testament, the word "flesh" sums up all the evil inclinations of our old nature that persist in us even after we die with Christ in Baptism (see Gal. 5:16-22). Making the Sign of the Cross expresses our decision to crucify these desires of the flesh and to live by the Spirit, like tossing off a dirty shirt or blouse. Making the Sign indicates our stripping ourselves of our evil inclinations and clothing ourselves with the behaviors of Christ (see Col. 3:5-15). The Church Fathers taught that the Sign of the Cross diffused the force of powerful temptations such as anger and lust. So, no matter how strongly we are tempted, we can use the Sign of the Cross to activate our freedom in Christ and conquer even our besetting sins.