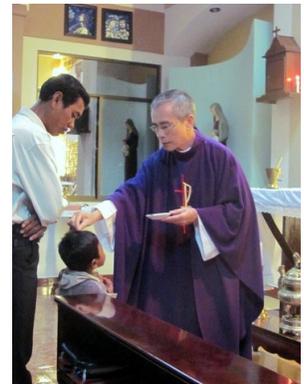


*February/March 2021*

Dear Friend of the Missions,

Are you ready for it? **Ash Wednesday 2021 arrives on February 17<sup>th</sup>** . *And, of course, this year we have to learn how to live with the **Covid-19** pandemic which is affecting all of our lives.* The pandemic has forced us to alter our day to day life and for most of us it means that we have had to slow down a bit. Wearing masks has become common place and social distancing is a must. The days and weeks all seem to blend together and it is difficult to distinguish one day from the other. It's all the same.



The Church has a *spiritual antidote* for breaking the monotony of the pandemic and its restrictions. We call it **Lent** and it begins on **Ash Wednesday**, which is on **February 17<sup>th</sup>** this year. This day is a public recognition of our human weakness and frailty as we go to the church to have ashes placed on our foreheads. It certainly will be a different experience this year because of the pandemic. I wonder if our churches will even offer the ashes this year?



**Ashes** have been used even before Christian times as a symbol of our mortality, of mourning, and of penance. The word "ashes" is found in the Old Testament a total of 48 times and in the New Testament it is found four times. Using ashes as a symbol of penance is very much a part of our Catholic Christian tradition. It is an **outward reminder** that we need to spend some quality time on a daily basis to do some **inner soul searching about our past, our present, and our future**. *Do I think that I am where I am today without the graces and blessings of God?* Ashes can be a reminder that the only certainty in life is death. Everything else is

given to us by our loving God.



**Lent is more than a time for us to do penance.** It's also a time to look at our Catholic Christian lives to see if anything needs to be "fine tuned". It is a time perhaps for us to **show appreciation** and to **give thanks** for all the **graces and blessings we have received** throughout the past year. *Do I really believe that God loves me and that He loves everyone the same way? Even if they are another color, or religion, or economic status, or political party?* If there are areas that need a little bit of "tweaking" then Lent is the perfect time to do so. **What are your plans for Lent?** Instead of focusing on the "nots" I would suggest doing *more* of something such as reading more Scripture, spending more time in quiet meditation, visiting ailing parents or friends in person is not possible this year but a phone call can offer a sign of concern and love.

Unfortunately, this year I will not be able to return to my beloved Vietnam because of the pandemic. The country has closed its borders to foreigners in the hope that it will help in alleviating the affects of *Covid-19*. My Lenten Experience is going to be quite different as I reintroduce myself to our USA customs and practices during this special time of the year, The quarantine regulations allow me to spend more time in prayer and meditation and I am able to be more present to my fellow brothers in Community.



**Participating in public and private acts of sacrifice with the Catholic Christian community during this holy time strengthens everyone. Our communal actions unify us. I encourage you to share your Lenten sacrificial practices with your children and grandchildren. They won't learn about our Catholic Faith Traditions unless you share it with them.**

Take time each day to get away from the distractions and temptations of this world and give some extra time to the Lord. *I am sure that the pandemic has given you more free time than ever before.*



During this holy season of Lent, consider doing something special for someone as an act of unsolicited love. *The people that you reach out to will be surprised and so will you as you experience the joy of helping someone in their time of need.*

**If during the course of your Lenten journey you discover that your simplified schedule leaves you with some extra funds** (*one less beverage each day, fewer movies, 9 holes of golf instead of 18, or . . . 25 cents each time you have a negative thought about someone?*)

**you can be sure that our Southwest Franciscan Missions would be most accepting and appreciative of them.** May God be with you and your loved ones in All Ways. Let us continue to pray for each other. ***Please stay safe and remember to practice social distancing and wear your mask.*** You are protecting yourself and others by doing so. I wish you,

Peace and All Good!

*Br Bruce, OFM*

**P.S.** We have a limited number of “**Little Black Book**” Lenten Meditations available if you are interested. It contains a six minute daily meditation for every day of Lent and it is published by the Diocese of Saginaw, MI. We will gladly send one to you while our supply lasts.



You can make your **Lenten Sacrificial Offering** here: [Donation Link](#)