

February 14, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent begins this Wednesday, February 17th, a day of Fast and Abstinence. All Fridays of Lent are also days of Abstinence from meat and things made from meat. Please see the schedule in the bulletin, and also sent home in a mailing, for the schedule for Ash Wednesday services, Stations of the Cross, Confessions, and other spiritual events. During Lent we fast, pray, and offer sacrifices of charity for others while repenting of our sins and asking God's mercy upon us so that we may be freed from sin and filled with gifts and graces from the Holy Spirit. We seek to empty ourselves of the things we don't really need in order to be filled with God. There are penances and practices we all keep together as the Body of Christ, the Church, and those that we choose individually, as part of our Lenten journey into the spiritual desert with Christ who also fasted and prayed for 40 days. Additionally, after God cleansed the world from evil in the 40 Day Flood during the time of Noah, the world was given new life and a new start. May our offering of penance, repentance, prayer, and charitable sacrifices to God during Lent give us new life in God's grace and a new spiritual start this coming Easter.

To keep the penance of fasting, the minimum fast is to eat just one full meal that day. If necessary to maintain strength for working and other duties, one may take something a two other meal times provided the amount of food combined in the two meals would not equal the amount of food in a full meal. One would not eat in between meals. Water never breaks the fast. One may choose a more intense fast if one's health would allow it. The penance of fasting should be followed by those who are 18 to 60. Those with health conditions and those of other ages should do what they are able according to his or her condition.

To keep the penance of abstinence from meat, one should avoid eating meat or other food made with or from meat. "Meat" includes all land and air animals such as beef, chicken, pork. We do not eat the flesh of these animals which would be normally offered in sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem because we recall that only Jesus' flesh and blood can deliver us from sin. Every Catholic from the age of 14 onward until we leave this world should follow this penance together on the appointed days of Ash Wednesday and every Friday of Lent. It is wise to teach and help children under 14 to also follow this practice, if their health allows, in order to teach them how to live this practice for the rest of life. It is also good to remember that each Friday of the year, outside of days that are solemnities, such as Christmas, are days of penance. All Christians should offer some kind of penance every Friday of the year in remembrance of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. It is highly encouraged that our weekly Friday penance each Friday outside of Lent be to abstain from meat. However, on Fridays outside of Lent, we may choose other forms of penance to offer instead.

Voluntary fasting, as described above, is encouraged on all weekdays of Lent, however, some form of penance should be offered by all each weekday of Lent. This is the practice of "giving things up" or abstaining from a particular good thing for

Lent. Additionally, some choose to keep their fasting, abstinence, prayer, and acts of charity throughout the season of Lent even on Sundays, even though Sundays are not considered days of penance. The practice of keeping the penance until the Easter Vigil on all days, including Sundays, is a commendable offering to the Lord. It goes without saying that giving up a sinful habit for Lent is something that should be done always and is not directly considered to be penance but should be done, of course, as a necessary part of repentance and reconciliation. All should do his or her best to confess one's sins in the Sacrament of Confession and convert one's heart more fully to the Lord.

Please remember that there will be an outdoor drive-in Mass at St. Mary's Visitation at 6 pm on Ash Wednesday. Please check the schedule for the other Mass time at the three parishes in the collaborative. Ashes will be sprinkled on the top of the head in order to avoid physical contact according to the protocol of our diocese during these times of pandemic.

This Sunday is also St. Valentine's Day and we are celebrating National Marriage Week in the Catholic Church in the USA. Please pray for all marriages and families that they will grow in God's love and grace to be witness of Christ for each other and all. Let's also pray for the restoration of marriage and family life in our culture and society, for the healing of challenging marriages, and for all those who are preparing to enter the vocation of marriage, that they will be the best of husbands and wives for one another, their children, and for the generations to come. It is good to remind ourselves that Catholics are called to celebrate marriage as a sacrament within the Catholic Church. We are always happy to help Catholics do that even if they have been married "outside of the Catholic Church." There is always a remedy to bring ourselves and our marriages into a state of God's good graces within His Church. Please encourage every Catholic you know to seek out first, or to restore, a marriage recognized and lived-out in the Catholic Church. Here is a brief article on Marriage as a Sacrament for your reflection:

"When the Catholic Church teaches that marriage between two baptized persons is a sacrament, it is saying that the couple's relationship expresses in a unique way the unbreakable bond of love between Christ and his people. Like the other six sacraments of the Church, marriage is a sign or symbol which reveals the Lord Jesus and through which his divine life and love are communicated. All seven sacraments were instituted by Christ and were entrusted to the Church to be celebrated in faith within and for the community of believers. The rituals and prayers by which a sacrament is celebrated serve to express visibly what God is doing invisibly.

In a sacramental marriage, God's love becomes present to the spouses in their total union and also flows through them to their family and community. By their permanent, faithful and exclusive giving to each other, symbolized in sexual intercourse, the couple reveals something of God's unconditional love. The sacrament of Christian marriage involves their entire life as they journey together through the ups and downs of marriage and become more able to give to and receive from each other. Their life becomes sacramental to the extent that the couple cooperates with God's action in their life and

sees themselves as living “in Christ” and Christ living and acting in their relationship, attitudes and actions.

Catholic teaching holds that sacraments bring grace to those who receive them with the proper disposition. Grace is a way of describing how God shares the divine life with us and gives us the help we need to live as followers of Christ. In marriage, the grace of this sacrament brings to the spouses the particular help they need to be faithful and to be good parents. It also helps a couple to serve others beyond their immediate family and to show the community that a loving and lasting marriage is both desirable and possible.

Pope Paul VI wrote: “By it [the Sacrament of Matrimony] husband and wife are strengthened and...consecrated for the faithful accomplishment of their proper duties, for the carrying out of their proper vocation even to perfection, and the Christian witness which is proper to them before the whole world” (*Humanae Vitae*, n. 25).” Taken from: <https://www.foryourmarriage.org/marriage-as-sacrament/>

May Jesus bless all married couples this weekend on St. Valentine's Day and every day throughout the year! May all of us live-out our own personal vocation, whatever our call, even more faithfully during this upcoming season of Lent!

In Jesus who fasted and prayed for 40 days,
Fr. Derda, Fr. Steve, Deacon Russ, Deacon Ed