

Today is Ash Wednesday and we begin the season of Lent. In this season we are asked to engage in prayer, fasting and almsgiving. I want to direct your attention to the display in front of the altar for a minute. We have assembled a unique grouping of items that we hope will help keep us focused on the activities of Lent that I just listed. Prayer, Fasting, and Alms giving are Lenten practices that we have had with us for our entire life. But unfortunately familiarity can breed contempt. By creating this display we want people to look in the mirror and reflect on their personal relationship with God. Is it strong and viable or is it something that needs some work and adjustment. My hope is that we will all take that time necessary to look deep into the mirror that reflects our relationship with God and come to understand in new and challenging ways what Christ is calling from us. As St. Paul mentions in the second reading today, we are ambassadors for Christ. When we go out into the world, people should see Christ in us; most clearly in the things we do and the words we speak.

When we go about our daily routines; be it at home, at school, at the office or during our times of recreation can we say with confidence that we display Christ. Are we ambassadors of Christ. If we are not then Lent is the time to work on improving our role. If we have become distracted in our relationship with God then we need to get back on track and it begins with the sacrament of reconciliation. Remember we are in the Year of Mercy indicated by the banner that is hanging in our church. A core part of that celebration is reconciliation. As Lent begins it is important for us to take advantage of the opportunities in the days ahead to celebrate the sacrament but these forty days go quickly so it is important that we not procrastinate. Every Tuesday night from 5 until 7 at St. Mary's or every Saturday night after the 530 mass At St. Joseph we are invited to draw God's healing presence close to us in order that his warmth and compassion can mend the cracks and heal the breaks that exist.

Along with the sacrament of reconciliation, it can also be an opportune time to read the Bible and other spiritual works including the little black books that can offer guidance and direction during this time of self evaluation.

If we do not already do so, it would be good for us to start our day with prayer, asking God to protect us against the forces of evil that want to tempt us and pull us away from our God.

It would also do us good to end the day with prayer giving thanks to God for his guiding hand in the events of the day. It is also an ideal time to consider attending daily mass and the Stations of the Cross. At St. Mary's the stations will be prayed on Monday nights and at St. Joseph they will be prayed on Thursday nights. These activities can strengthen us and remind us of the great sacrifice that was endured for our salvation.

Fasting is another opportunity for us to reflect on and appreciate what we have in our life and what we can go without in order to understand the plight of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the country and the world. So take a rice bowl with you

today and use it to make a difference in the lives of others. This then becomes a chance to give alms in order that others may know the security of having a roof over their head and food on their table.

Today is Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent; let's not waste a minute of this season and all the opportunities that it presents for us.