

## FROM THE DESK *of* FR. MARK BRAUER—LENT 2024

I was looking at my appointments for this coming week and there was a reminder to make a personal plan for Lent. Lent begins this Wednesday - Ash Wednesday is February 14th.

Planning for Lent is a great gift to give to yourself and others. We all need God's mercy (that is if we humble ourselves to admit that reality). Each of us is called to be merciful as God is merciful to us. Mercy is not a pliant stuffed animal. Mercy is how God would clothe us. Mercy is what we learn or even what we become through prayer. The three pillars of Lent: prayer, fasting and almsgiving are a great way to begin to plan for Lent.

Begin with prayer and ask the Spirit of God to help you have the spiritual insight to examine your life in Christ and see the area(s) in your life that needs to change for the better. Make bold plans for how you will fast – fast from our mouths certainly, but how about fasting with our eyes, our vocal cords, our ears, and our precious time? What must we cut out of our lives if there is to be room for mercy to take root? How will you fast?

How will you give alms? How will you explore some new ways to share your treasures, time, and talents... How do you help the poor, the widow, and the homeless? Do you share your time and talents with the parish? Is it time to be a good steward of the gifts God has given you. How can the 40 days of Lent give you a clearer vision of a Gospel way of Life?

How will you pray in Lent? Do you have a healthy prayer life? Do you pray daily? How will you use your wonderful vocabulary of words to

praise God? Do you prepare for Sunday Mass by taking time to pray the Scripture readings assigned to that Sunday? This can be done as a family.

The Gospel summons the Church (all of us) into Lent. Forty days of fasting, almsgiving and praying. Therefore, Lent is not a one-day show. Lent is forty days and then we enter the Triduum, the three days that get us from Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday – a period of amazing grace.

The season of Lent is not some sort of churchy self-improvement program that asks just a tiny bit of self-denial and then rewards us with lost pounds or a little extra cash. Lent is not something I do myself, my own little good resolutions, my own little prayers, my own little coins for the poor. What is Lent? It is literally breathtaking and life giving. It is hard and deeply disturbing because it is not about your piety or mine, not about sins, not about earning grace or points or anything else. It is the church becoming the Church. It is about the baptized remembering the grace of baptism. It is about good human beings, like you and me, trying to grapple with what the Gospel asks of us so that we will continue to be a light to the nations or at the very least among our families and neighbors.

The forty days of Lent call all of us regardless of age, into training to do and be all that we promised and all that we renounced on the day of our baptism. By spending more time in prayer, by learning to fast in some ways that will tell us what we really hunger for, by learning to give what we call “ours” without counting on anything except the mercy of God – this is what Lent can be for us.

No one does it alone. The Church keeps Lent, not you or me. We need to be faithful to our Sunday's obligation. We need to pray together, to hear each other singing, and so need to celebrate at the Eucharistic table. We need to bring to worship our best efforts and our constant failures. We need to hear again the stories Sunday-to-Sunday, the crucial stories that will unfold in us the meaning of being baptized into the life of Christ.

Let us make this Lent a Lent like never before. Let us pray, fast and give graciously to the needs of others. Let us ask our beloved Savior to let go of our desperate hold on what we call “ours” and start working ourselves out of slavery and into the freedom that God has graciously given us. Then, we will be able to walk boldly and yet with some trepidation toward the font where on the night of the sacred Easter Vigil we will dare to promise and renounce anew and we will dare to baptize the newcomers who desire to drown all the works of sin and to live freely as servants of the Lord. So, take time over the next several days to plan for Lent. The season of Lent is not about death, it is about life.

Peace,  
Rev. Mark Brauer

