

1st Sunday of Lent

The Lenten season is an opportunity to grow in your spiritual life. Long gone are the days of giving up chocolate, or dessert, or ice cream....with the secret desire of being 10 pounds lighter on Easter. Over the course of years I have discovered that a thoughtful and strategic approach to Lent helps people to grow in faith and spirituality. This year, I would like to suggest the following challenge for all parishioners to consider.

Last weekend I shared with you the story about the time when I asked Mother Teresa if I could come to Calcutta to help her ministry with those who were poor and dying. She gave me profound advice, which I have never forgotten. Wisely, she said, "Find your own Calcutta." This prophetic message was given to remind us that poverty is all around us. And Lent, is a great opportunity to put our prayer and our faith in action. What follows is my Lenten challenge:

First: Make a commitment to Fast for a Purpose. In addition to following the obligatory Fast scheduled on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and if possible Holy Saturday. The Scriptures reveal that when people fasted it was for a purpose – not just a religious exercise. (Daniel Fasted to "encourage" the prophesied release of the Israelites from Babylonian captivity. As you Fast, what will be your purpose? Are there special needs in your family? Is there a loved one who has not accepted Christ? Do you have financial pressures? Is there illness that needs healing? Do you need a new job or help with your business? Fast for Others: Fast for the Needs of the World... Fast for a purpose and see what the Lord will do.

Second: Incorporate a new form of Prayer: Perhaps you will try to go to daily Mass, or Mass twice per week during Lent. Incorporate in your prayer something that you do not usually do. Make a commitment to attend our unique Stations of the Cross held on Friday evenings. Join us for the Rosary recited in the Church or via Livestream each day at 8:30 AM and also at Noon, or the Divine Mercy Chaplet at 3 PM. (Remember, the livestreams are archived daily on our parish website, if you cannot pray at these specific times on any given day). Create a Marian chapel in your home. (Set up a special devotional area with an image of the Blessed Mother, and a candle.) Go to that private area at a convenient time each day and offer the following prayer formula: think about a person in your immediate family...what are their needs?...then offer a Hail Mary for that person. Do the same for each family member. Another new form of prayer is to start a spiritual journal. Write a brief summary of your day and try to identify where you felt God's presence most clearly each day.

Third: Make a Sacrificial Gift of Alms to the South Jersey Catholic Ministries Appeal: The House of Charity. Use the pledge card in the pew or respond to the letter I mailed to you earlier this month. A sacrificial gift is one that requires you to go the extra mile. A wonderful gauge is to review what gift is a comfortable amount, and then strive to move up to the next level or increase by 10%. Remember, what YOU DO for the least of your brothers and sisters, YOU DO for Jesus.

Fourth: Make a commitment to go to Confession on a Wednesday evening during the Lenten Season. Please note that many of the parishes in our area plan to open their churches every Wednesday evening at 7 PM during Lent so parishioners can go to confession at a parish that is not their own. It is called "The Lights are Open for You" Program. I advise that you call the parish first to make sure they are participating.

Fifth: Commit time now and mark your calendar to celebrate the Sacred Triduum Retreat: Companion the Lord on His spiritual journey by attending the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy

Thursday Night (7 PM) and the Passion of our Lord on Good Friday (3 PM), along with one of our Easter Masses. Don't let the Lenten Season begin without making a commitment to do all of the things above, and watch what Jesus will do for you.

With a loving and grateful heart,

Msgr. Marucci