

# LENT 2017

**Turn toward God when..... you are driving the kids to their functions and shopping for groceries.**

**Turn toward God when.....you have to be patient with one of your relatives who is trying so hard but just does not seem to get it straight.**

**Turn toward God when..... you just feel tired and need to sit down and rest for about fifteen minutes.**

**Turn toward God when..... you are tired caring for your elderly parents and all the demands they make on your time and energy.**

## WALK THESE FORTY DAYS OF LENT

This coming Wednesday (March 1) we have Ash Wednesday. On that day we mark the beginning of the season of Lent. This bulletin seeks to be an aid to help you prepare and enter into this holy day.

We observe the season of Lent as forty days. This is in keeping with the images of the Scriptures. Noah and the animals were in the boat forty days and forty nights. Moses lead the Hebrews slaves out into the desert for forty years. Jesus prayed and fasted in the wilderness for forty days. The number forty stands for completion.

Now our forty days are mean to lead us into the wilderness where we are vulnerable. Anyone who has walked in the deserts of Nevada or New Mexico know how threatening this could be. Whenever you are out in the desert you could easily die of thirst.

But it is in the desert that we search for God.

All the significant teachers of the ways of faith point out that God is never “just there.’ We humans must walk on a journey to discover God. There is risk here. We could fail! What if we go looking for God and there is only emptiness?

During these forty days of Lent we put ourselves into that space where we can hear God. We slow down through prayer, the study of the Scriptures and fasting to be attentive to God.

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*Look forward to Ash Wednesday.*

*This is a holy day even though it is very much a work day.*

*This is the beginning of the forty days of Lent.*

*During Lent we place ourselves in a different space. We move into the desert.*

*It will be in the desert where we can be more attentive to God.*

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*Always listen to the little ones of this earth. Why do they find the taking of ashes a powerful religious moment? Why do they feel very connected with God when their forehead is marked with ashes?*

*The little ones of this earth are on to something. They may not have the language of the university professor but they know the truth when they see it. A little one of this world has less need to put on airs. They are closer to the pulse of their human weakness and their sinfulness. Their breathing is much closer to salvation. See how meaningful it is to see the little ones of this world accept the ashes on their forehead. This very human action is touching deep within their souls. This is a call to a change of life. The ashes signal conversion. This is a divine moment.*

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PRACTICING LENT?

No one ventures out on a journey if they do not have a goal in mind. No one just drives across the country to 'see things.' They set out to see some very specific things, events and people. Their journey has purpose. They want to meet certain people and be enriched by the friendship.

Lent is a journey where we seek to enter into a deeper friendship with God. We want to draw closer to God and be attentive to his work among us. We set out knowing that we are incomplete. We need and want greater friendship with God.

In the ancient times the old wise master directed the young disciple. "I pray that God will break your heart wide open so that the love of God may fall and fill your heart!" This is a very drastic move but it gives us a very good picture of what needs to happen in these forty days.

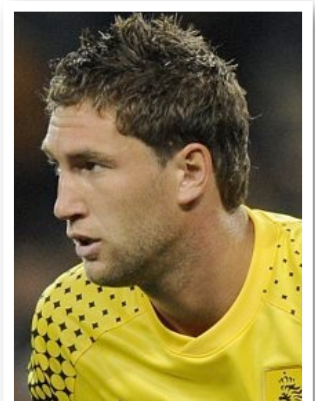
We begin with humility. We have been rather selfish and non-cooperative with the Holy Spirit. We have built up a bank of excuses to avoid helping our neighbors and co-workers. We have been harsh and very critical of those who are struggling just to keep up with living.

The ashes of Lent are a signal to become honest. Name your sins and your selfish attitudes. A humble heart will encounter the resurrected Jesus. A humble heart will know how much they need the strength that only the Holy Spirit can give.

A humble heart will always be more cooperative with the movement of the Holy Spirit. When we become too preoccupied with ourselves then we squeeze out any space for the Holy Spirit to work.

As you begin Lent 2017 picture yourself as lost in the hot desert. Your water bottle ran empty a little over a hour ago. It is 44C and the sweat is pouring off your body. Walking in this heat is excruciating. Now, in all this struggle, someone comes with a fresh water bottle. It tastes so good!

Now, in the heat and threat of your own selfishness and sins, walk towards the Lord. Look for the refreshing waters that are being offered on your journey through these forty days of Lent.



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## Lent is a time for more intense prayer

Many people explain that they are having trouble with prayer. They feel they do not know how to pray. They realize that to pray like they did when they were a kid in grade five is not good enough. Now that I am forty, I should pray like a mature adult.

The focus of prayer is not on ourselves. We must be alert not to fall into the trap of being like our friends who talk all the time. We know that people who talk a lot are always talking about themselves. Prayer is not centered on me, myself and I; no matter how many troubles I am going through at this point in my life.

Prayer is first and foremost to be silent. Be attentive to God. There is no need for a vigorous conversation to happen. Prayer begins with 'just being in the presence of God.' As with any

trusted friendship, it may take some time before a conversation develops. Be patient when you begin your prayer. Spend more time just being with God.

Always think of the older man, years ago in France, who stopped by the village church and spent a few moments in prayer. The people said: 'Now, this man knows how to pray.' They asked him how he prays. He simply replied, "God's here. I here! That's good." Make your prayer as simple as that. Just be in the presence of God.

Be quiet enough, to allow God to come. Perhaps there will be no verbal evidence that God has come, but your heart senses the presence of the Holy Spirit.

People who have only been born into the religion often have a underdeveloped sense of prayer. It begins and is centered in their own concerns and sufferings. Adult prayer is

the opposite to this. Prayer is moving into God. We are entering into the very heart and compassion of God. Prayer is learning to share in the concerns and the pains that beat within the heart of God. Prayer is trying to put the finger of our life on the pulse of God.

During these forty days of Lent we want to take ownership that we have been too busy with our own concerns. Our hectic lifestyle has not allowed too much room for God to enter in.

Take a few moments each day to pay attention to God. Make time to listen to God. Seek to build an adult prayer life.

As you read this bulletin, look forward to the gift that will be by your Lent. This is a special invitation from the Holy Spirit to pay attention and share in the very heart and life of God.

**Speak, Lord, your servant is listening ...** *May I slow down sufficiently to hear your voice in the business of my work-day life.*

**Speak, Lord, your servant is listening ...** *May I recognize your hand when I encounter the sufferings and confusion of others. May I look to see the very face of Jesus in each person I meet today.*

### You can only hear if .....

- You practice spiritual discipline for prayer.
- You listen first for the person of God and then only after that you listen for the words
- You know that God wants to be with you and share God's goodness with you today

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**May the ashes be rubbed on...**

*..my attitudes that are so self centered.*

*.. the excuses I make to avoid helping my aged Mother*

*.. any grandstanding I do to make my self look important in the eyes of others.*

### **Where should the ashes be marked on our bodies?**

Use your imagination for this exercise. Where should the ashes actually be marked on our bodies (i.e., our lives)?

The ashes should be rubbed over the most sinful part of our bodies. In a very respectful way the ashes are rubbed on our forehead. This is polite and necessary in the public forum.

But the ashes (marking our sinfulness) should be rubbed first of all on our tongues. This is the most sinful part of our body. We speak hurtful words that wound other people. We speak our works of misunderstanding about the weakness and failures of others.

In your imagination picture the ashes placed on your tongue to remind you of all the hurtful words that you have uttered in the last twelve months.

Then take the ashes to your wrists. These of the limbs that we pull back when we are asked to help others. Instead of using our hands to lift a fellow sister or brother in trouble, we pull back. The ashes on our wrists are a sign, not of the evil we have done but of the good we refuse to do. Ashes on our wrists indicate where we need to improve in our moral understanding. As a human being I can sin just as much by refusing to do good as I can by doing evil.

Then spread the ashes over the indifference of my shoulders. These are the moments when I just ignore trying to right the wrongs of this world. Indifference is insidious. It soaks into our emotions and gives us excuses to always be limp. There is nothing I can do is soon translated into, 'there is nothing that I will do.'

## PRAYER FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

**Take Psalm 51 that will be used for the liturgy on Ash Wednesday.**

**God is never distant and hiding from our concerns. As we breath in a out, so we breath the very love and mercy of God into our lives. Even in our failures God is very much with us. Pray these words over your bad attitudes.**

**"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." (Ps 51, 1)**

**As you are getting ready for these forty days of Lent, pack in your backpack the very words of Psalm 51. Own them. Eat them and make them your own. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.... restore me to the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit." (Ps 51, 10 + 12)**