

LENT NEWSLETTER

JUST BE WITH GOD



WHY WE NEED LENT MORE THAN EVER BEFORE

If I was to find one word to describe modern living I would have to use “exhausted.” We are working so hard, trying to keep our kids so involved and learning so many specialized skills, that we come to end of the day completely played out. But it is an exhaustion of our nerves, not necessarily of our muscles.

No one needs to have one more task to do. We need space to live, breath and just be! What good does it do to run the marathon all

day but not have time just to enjoy putting your children to bed? Or to remember how wonderful it was to have your simple supper with all the family around the table?

Lent holds up the stop sign! Get your thumb on the very pulse of life. Touch the goodness of God and allow God to touch your tired and frazzled spirit.

Lent is a gift. A time for prayer and enjoyment with God.

HOW TO USE THIS BULLETIN

Time is the most important possession we have. How we use it spells out what is important in our life.

An example of how important time is to us is found in the young twenty-five year old who gets up, washes, drives thirty minutes to work, spends his day dealing with customers and chatting with his co-workers and then driving back those thirty minutes. But all day he looks forward to the ten minutes he will have with his girl friend when she calls him from her scientific project in South America. His entire day is framed by those ten minutes. They make his day worthwhile.

Lent is given as a gift to us harried, exhausted and hard working people. This is a time to find a small space each day to just slow down and pray attention to God. Find a prayer time that allows you to just sit and be in the presence of God's Holy Spirit.

If you have drifted away from the discipline of daily prayer, now is the time to come back to listening to the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER IS BREATHING GOD

There is a wonderful story told about an elderly gentleman who complained: "I talk and talk to God but he never replies back."

"That's your problem. You talk too much!" was the correction given.

Prayer is not a one way communication street. Prayer is living and breathing the very person of God. Sometimes there may be a long quiet period of silence.

Lent is this wonderful opportunity to get back into a regular prayer life. We have become so busy that prayer gets shoved to the end of the day and then we are too tired to even pay attention to God. You cannot have prayer when you are exhausted and ready for bed.

Prayer needs discipline and practice. Try to find a time that works for you. It may be the few quiet moments you have with your morning cup of coffee. You take your Bible and read a few verses from one of the four Gospels. You give the words a few moments to sink in. You share a few thoughts and feelings with God. This might be as brief as your prayer can be but we need to have a regular time for prayer to happen.

The ancient spiritual teachers were so wise when they insisted that we also work prayer by habit. If you are the morning cup of coffee prayer person you will find it so much easier to move into prayer once your first cup is poured.

Do not demand that prayer always be interactive. Many days we will be no more than just present to God. There is a wonderful story from the Cure d'Ars (the parish priest in Ars in France around the 1860's). There was this older worker who dropped into the church every evening as he came home from work. Now this man should know how to pray.

They approached him to explain his prayer. He simply replied: "God's here. I'm here. That's good!" So simple. So truthful.

Many times your prayer will be just sitting in the presence of God the Father. No words. No requests. Just be there with God!

One of the simplest definitions of prayer that I ran across was a wonderful man in his mid-sixties. He said as he moved into prayer: "Well, I think it is time for God to look at me!"

Can you find a better way to describe what prayer is?



WE CANNOT ACCEPT THAT SALT SHOULD BECOME TASTELESS OR THE LIGHT BE KEPT HIDDEN (CF. MT 5:13-16). THE PEOPLE OF TODAY CAN STILL EXPERIENCE THE NEED TO GO TO THE WELL, LIKE THE SAMARITAN WOMAN, IN ORDER TO HEAR JESUS, WHO INVITES US TO BELIEVE IN HIM AND TO DRAW UPON THE SOURCE OF LIVING WATER WELLING UP WITHIN HIM (CF. JN 4:14). THE DOOR OF FAITH #3



LEARNING TO PRAY WITH THE WORD OF GOD

You probably were not brought up with praying the Scriptures but Lent is a wonderful time to begin to use the Word of God in your daily prayer.

The best way to begin is to pick up your Bible, open at one of the four Gospels in the New Testament and start to read slowly. Do not try to read too much. Do this in manageable chunks.

The Bible is simply the revelation of God written down. It is a recording of God's revelation. But the Revelation of God was never meant to be codified in print. It is always active, alive and moving among us. When we proclaim the Word of God in the Sunday liturgy this is God speaking to us – today! This is no reading of some historical record.

God is coming to us now. Always compare it to music printed on a sheet of paper. It is simply a record. The music is only real when it is played on a musical instrument. The music must come alive. So too with the Word of God. It must come alive

within our lives, our churches and our world.

One of the best ways to pray with the Scriptures is to take one of the four Gospels, just read a few verses (not too much) and begin to ask: What does this mean?

You may have taken Luke, chapter 15, about the man who has a hundred sheep. He loses one out in the wilderness (the lost sheep will be eaten by the coyotes). He goes out in search of the lost one. He finds it! He is overjoyed with the one sheep.

Now, this is how God feels and acts. Whenever anyone wanders off God goes looking for the lost one. When you begin applying it to your own life the lost one may be one of your aunts who is so bitter and angry. She has nothing good to say about anyone. You avoid her. But is she not one of the lost ones, lost in her anger, and her toxic venom that is so negative to others?

When we pray with the Gospels they have many applications to give us. Maybe this is the time that the Holy Spirit is moving you to pray for this aunt? Maybe this is the time that the Holy Spirit is moving you to be patient with the slow change in the atmosphere of your own family?

Each day during Lent there are special readings that are used in the daily liturgy. If you have a copy of the Lenten meditations book take the readings for that particular day. Read one of the

readings slowly. Meditate on the reading. Perhaps you might focus on one word, one phrase. Then speak to God about the word. Listen to God coming to you with this word from the Scriptures.

Sit with the Word. Maybe this is just a time to sit and be with God. There are so few thoughts that go through your mind. Then on other days your mind may be working overtime and it is so hard just to concentrate on the Word.

Just be with the Word. Bring your concerns to God and be open to receive the concerns of God toward you.

The Word of God is meant to become a living part of our lives. The Word is meant to soak into the fibers of our muscles and shape our attitudes towards God, life and others.

Be realistic. Do not try to cover too much ground when you pray the Scriptures. Take the pieces that the Holy Spirit is giving you, however small or large it might be.

Use the Word of God in your prayer. Enjoy it! Live it! Love it!



LITANY FOR A LENTEN DAY

Eternal God, maker of heaven and earth,

have mercy on us.

Incarnate Word, redeemer of the world,

have mercy on us.

Abiding Spirit, giver of light and life,

have mercy on us.

For turning away from your presence,
for disobeying your word and commandments,

forgive us, Lord.

For trusting in our own strength instead of yours, for betraying your trust and the trust of others,

forgive us, Lord.

For resisting your grace and refusing your blessings, for holding back from proclaiming our faith in you,

forgive us, Lord.

For damaging this earth and exploiting its creatures, for neglecting and wasting the gifts you have given us,

forgive us, Lord.

For failing to forgive as we have been forgiven. For judging others and bearing grudges,

forgive us, Lord.

For skimping on our commitments and relationships, for failing in hospitality,

forgive us, Lord.

For tolerating oppression, injustice, and wrong, for keeping silent when we should have spoken up,

forgive us, Lord.

For turning away when others have offered us love, for closing our hearts when others have needed compassion,

forgive us, Lord.

For all we have done unkindly, unjustly and dishonestly, for our careless speech and hurtful words,

forgive us, Lord.

Most merciful God,
we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
and in what we have failed to do:
we have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves;
we repent, and are sorry for all our sins.

Father, forgive us.

Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



THREE PRAYERS FOR LENT

1 We pray for your forgiveness as a nation which does not know how to distribute the wealth you have given us. We pray that you remove our pride and turn us compassionately to one another. O God, hear our prayer. Lord, have mercy.

2 In baptism, you found a family, yet we do not know how to acknowledge that we are kindred to one another. Let Jesus, our brother, teach us to share with one another openly and generously and repent for the times we refuse to care. O God, hear our prayer. Lord, have mercy.

3 In our weakness, you show us your strength. We pray for those who are sick or afflicted in any way. Let the apostle's example help them never to lose heart. As dying, yet eternally alive; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. O God, hear our prayer. Lord, have mercy.