

## FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. This is a great season in which we are called to grow closer in our relationship with Christ. Following the words of Jesus (Ash Wednesday's Gospel, from Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18), the Church points out three ways in which we can grow closer to Almighty God: **fasting**, **almsgiving**, and **prayer**.

Most of us are familiar with the **fasting** piece – we give up something for Lent. Many people give up something like chocolate or sweets. I encourage you to think about what really stands in the way of your relationship with God, what keeps you from loving others, and consider giving that up (in whole or in part) for Lent. So, if you find you spend too much time texting or on Facebook, you might decide to give these up for Lent, so that you can spend that time loving God and others. For some creative ideas, check out: [lifeteen.com/what-to-give-up-25-creative-ideas-for-lent](http://lifeteen.com/what-to-give-up-25-creative-ideas-for-lent).

**Almsgiving:** The heart of the Christian life is to become more like God, who constantly gives of Himself. We are also called to be generous givers. I invite you to think about that you have in your house and what you *really* need. Do you have things that you could give to those who need it more than you? Maybe you could donating time to the Food Pantry, or a meal center, like *Cor Unum* in Lawrence. The Rice Bowls help people around the world through Catholic Relief Services – maybe instead of putting in the loose change in your pocket, you could make a conscious decision about how you can stretch yourself to give to others. You might decide to connect it with part of your fasting: if you always drink Dunkin' coffee, and you give that up for Lent, you could put the money you *would* have given to Dunkin' to the Rice Bowl.

I've been talking about prayer the last couple of weeks. Lent is a great time to look at our prayer lives and expand them, so we can get closer to God. The time that we have been given is a gift from God. The primary purpose for our being here, for existing, is to get to **know** God in a personal way, so that we can grow in **love** of God, and then in love, **serve** Him in this life, so that we can **be with Him forever in Heaven**. Our time is precious. *Every* moment, God gives us opportunities to know Him better, to love and serve Him. We are called to be good stewards of the gift of time. **Prayer** is a key part of this stewardship. If we can waste a couple of hours watching television, or surfing the net, or Facebook stalking, we should be able to spend time with something that really has meaning – eternal meaning: getting to know our God in prayer.

What are the ways you might be able to expand your prayer during Lent? If you do not have a daily prayer life, fight to make that time in your life. There are plenty of other things you might want to try adding, as well. Here are some suggestions:

- Go one daily Mass every week, in addition to the “Sunday obligation”
- Get a Mass journal, bring it to Mass, and ask God, “Show me one thing in this Mass that can help me to become a better version of myself.” When He shows you something in that Mass, write it down. Take a moment every day that week to look back on what God showed you at Mass. Do it throughout Lent (and beyond)
- Attend Stations of the Cross on Friday evenings (7:00pm)
- Set your alarm for 3:00pm, and spend a few moments (or longer) everyday consoling the Heart of Jesus at this precious hour when He gave His life for us
- Set aside family prayer time every day
- Pray the Rosary (to learn how: [ewtn.com/devotionals/prayers/rosary/how\\_to.htm](http://ewtn.com/devotionals/prayers/rosary/how_to.htm))
- Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet (to learn how: [ewtn.com/devotionals/mercy/dmmap.htm](http://ewtn.com/devotionals/mercy/dmmap.htm))
- Do an Examination of Conscience at the end of each day (for one format, see: [forums.catholic.com/showthread.php?t=845055](http://forums.catholic.com/showthread.php?t=845055))
- Get to Confession during the Lenten season (check out the bulletin insert for a list of times here)
- Commit to going to Eucharistic Adoration on Wednesdays (8:30-9:30am, 2-8pm, every week)
- Regularly stop into the Eucharistic Chapel at St. Patrick's (open 24/7) to say hello to Jesus

These are just some suggestions. There are plenty of other ways to be good stewards of prayer. The important thing is to do something to expand your relationship with God. Don't go overboard, saying you'll do 12 things – pick one or two, and do them well. It would be wonderful to make a life-changing decision, and not give it up at the end of Lent. Let's prepare now for Lent, so we can come into closer relationship with God!