

LENTEN TREE of SACRIFICE - A Time of Prayer, Giving and Sacrifice

Dear Community,

As the season of Lent approaches, Ash Wednesday will begin the Church's journey to the life changing destination that is Easter. This is a time to plan what we will do to live as Catholics. It is a time to focus on our faith and remember Jesus' death on the cross. It is also a time to look forward to Easter, the most important and most joyous day of the Church year. This year as a parish, let us concentrate and focus on the theme: "LENTEN TREE OF SACRIFICE".

Giving up something for Lent, eating fish on Fridays and fasting from meat, almsgiving and penance through the forty days of Lent - these are some of the practices for which Catholics are known. But WHY do we as Catholics do this? Because these are commitments - known as "Lenten Practices" or "Lenten disciplines" - the Catholic Church calls us each year to renew our "discipleship" in Christ. Specifically, each year during the liturgical season of Lent the Church asks us to pray, give alms, and fast.

PRAYER - We know the importance of prayer in our lives as individuals, as families and as community. Prayer is especially important during Lent as the Lenten season is a time for self-reflection, evaluation, and repentance. Lent asks us the important question: "What needs changing?" Lent calls us to a personal conversion and renewal, a recommitted life in Christ so that we might not just celebrate Easter forty days later, but also feel the risen Christ alive in us and in the world. This means PRAYER. During Lent we set aside time for prayer that is reflective in nature and reveals places where we have failed to open ourselves to God. A few examples of PRAYER might be to attend daily mass during the week, or perhaps on Friday evenings make it a family night by attending the Stations of the Cross. Praying the Rosary with friends or family, or attending Adoration Thursdays are communal acts of prayer. Both will encourage us to gather and pray together.

GIVING - Each day we witness situations of injustice, violence, and hatred. TV and the Internet bring these into our living rooms, but we also observe and live them in our own cities and homes. The Church calls us during Lent to be especially conscious of the needs of others and to act accordingly. GIVING materially to another is an act of Christian charity known as "almsgiving". During Lent, the Church also calls us to first convert ourselves, then to transform the world for justice, so that we might serve the Kingdom which Jesus lived and preached. A few ideas of GIVING might be to volunteer at a soup kitchen as part of your day off or to spend time with someone who has no one else to talk to, maybe visiting a friend or family member in a convalescent home or shelter.

SACRIFICE - Fasting and abstinence are not sacrifices for the sake of pain or vain discomfort. We are asked by the Catholic Church to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and are not to eat meat on the Friday's of Lent. Feeling an empty stomach, or fighting the urge to have that juicy steak or candy bar does more than just remind us that for some people an empty stomach, is their daily bread. Fasting and abstinence help us to ask the question: "What sustains me and gives me life?" What nourishes me on my journey of life? We will find the answer, not in the steak or the candy bar, but at the end of those forty days of Lent - in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We fast and abstain because, when we do, we are reminded of who we are, followers of the risen Christ. A few examples of SACRIFICE might be perhaps on the days we fast, to donate a Lenten food basket or food goods to Outreach, or donate money to Catholic Charities or the Salvation Army instead of going to a movie or out to lunch with friends or family members.

As Catholics we joyfully engage in Lenten disciplines because we are disciples. We pray, give alms (almsgiving), and sacrifice (fast), because we follow Christ, who loved us so much that He gave His own life, so that we might share in Eternal Life.

The Liturgy Planning Committee