



Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time B February 11, 2018

Next Wednesday is Ash Wednesday

Next Sunday is Our Catholic Appeal Sunday

This Wednesday, our worldwide Church family will begin the Holy Season of Lent. I will return to that important event in a moment.

Our Catholic Appeal Sunday (OCA)

Our Catholic Appeal Sunday is the way the 90+ parishes of our diocese fund the administration and ministries of our central office.

Each parish is assessed *about* 18% of its offertory income from the previous fiscal year. I say “assessed *about*” because parishes with low income are assessed less than 18% and parishes with high income are assessed more than 18%. Ascension is assessed 19.29% of its offertory income.

THIS YEAR OUR ASSESSMENT IS \$332,755.00,

The 10% increase in our assessment is partially due to an increase in offertory and partially based on the fact that we did not have to give as much money to the school as previously. Parishes with schools receive a deduction in their assessment for money given to operate their school.

Seven levels of giving in 2017

Newcomers to our parish who are in a position to participate in our *Catholic Appeal* may wonder how much to give. A general guideline is: Give as the Lord has given to you. (“*We desire not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice.*”) In our parish last year, we received gifts ranging from \$25 to \$10,000.

If you are in a position to be a **Major Donor by giving a gift of \$1,000 or more, please consider doing so.** If you cannot be a major donor, give at a level that you can and that makes you feel good about your gift.

- Last year, we received two gifts of \$10,000 and one gift of \$7,500
- 5 families pledged between \$3,100 and \$5,000, totaling \$19,100
- 9 families pledged between \$2,000 and \$3,000, totaling \$26,030

- 119 families pledged between \$1,000 and \$1,999 totaling \$111,034
- 120 parishioners pledged between \$501 and \$999, totaling \$86,807
- 381 parishioners pledged between \$101 and \$500, totaling \$108,260
- 316 parishioners pledged under \$100, totaling \$19,730

If you can give the same amount you gave last year that would be wonderful. If you are in a position to increase your gift by 5% or 10%, please consider doing so. While all levels of giving are appreciated, we cannot reach our goal without a good number of large gifts.

The parish gets to keep 2/3 of overage money which becomes a nice windfall for us. The other 1/3 of overage money goes into the Priest Retirement Fund.

Non-registered parishioners. I am aware that some people have been coming to our parish for years and do not register. Registration in a parish is a personal choice that each person must make for him/herself. If we decide not to register because we do not want to participate in the financial responsibilities of the parish even though we are in a position to do so, then we have made a *selfish* and *greedy* decision. If you come to Church on a regular basis and benefit from the services offered by the parish, I would hope you would take your responsibility seriously to help your parish meet its financial obligations. If you decide to contribute to *Catholic Appeal*, please know that we will *not* register you. You will only become an *official* member of the parish if and when *you* decide to do so. Envelopes will be in the pews next Sunday to allow you to participate if you choose to do so. (Please make checks payable to Ascension Catholic Church.)

Winter Parishioners. We welcome all our winter parishioners. I know that many of you are registered and play an active part in the parish life, including financially, while you are here—thank you! I realize that most of you have some form of *Catholic Appeal* in your home diocese. If you are here six months, perhaps you can give 50% of what you normally set aside for the funding of our diocese. If you are only here three or four months, perhaps you might consider sharing with us 25% of what you set aside to help our diocese. Each

year, we are blessed to have a good number of winter parishioners help us reach our OCA goal.

If you already gave your gift to the diocese, please take an OCA envelope that will be passed through the pews next Sunday and write on it: ‘Sent gift to the diocese’ and print your name.

Please be aware that *Legacy Gifts*, *Stock Gifts* and *Matching Gifts* are welcome. You can also use your credit card to give. You can give online by visiting www.cfocf.org/OCA and clicking on “Give Now.”

LENT—A TIME OF SPIRITUAL DEEPENING

This Wednesday, millions of Catholics across our nation will go to their local Church to receive ashes on their forehead. Why ashes? In the religious realm, ashes have a twofold meaning:

- They are a stark reminder of our mortality. Hence, the words: “*Remember, man, you are but dust and unto dust you shall return.*”
- Ashes are a sign of repentance. In ancient Israel, when people felt convicted of sin and were moved to repentance, they put on ‘sackcloth and ashes.’ On Ash Wednesday, as the minister places the ashes on our forehead, he/she will say: “*Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.*”

In essence, when we come to Church next Wednesday to receive ashes on our forehead, we are publicly saying to the Lord: “*I want, with the help of your grace, to change my heart where change is needed.*”

If you are like me, you may wonder what you need to do for Lent, especially to improve your relationship with Christ. Perhaps, the first thing we need to do is seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. “*Holy Spirit, help me to see how I may deepen my relationship with you and with my heavenly Father and with Jesus.*”

Some practical suggestions for Lenten practices

For those still wondering what to do for Lent, the following are some suggestions to consider.

♦ *Create small pockets of quiet in our lives.* If we live alone, this may mean cutting back on TV in the morning or evening, or both; cutting back on the amount of time we spend listening to the radio in the car—including Catholic Radio. On the other hand, if we spend a lot of time listening to non-Christian radio, perhaps we can switch to Christian radio. I do find listening to good solid Catholic radio content to be uplifting.

♦ *Spiritual reading.* Many of you have already developed the good practice of engaging in spiritual reading which is food for the soul. But if this is *not* one

of your spiritual practices, perhaps consider making it so for Lent. What would be a good book to read? The one that touches your heart and speaks to you. If you have no clue where to begin, consider one of the four gospels (Mark is the shortest). If you have not looked at my book on prayer, consider it. People like it because it is very practical and down-to-earth.

♦ *Work on letting go some hurt, bitterness or resentment if you are carrying one.* Holding onto unforgiveness or bitterness is hurtful not only to our spiritual lives but also to our overall well-being. As many of you know, my small book, *How to Forgive Yourself & Others*, gives lots of practical guidance on how to let go of hurt.

♦ *Outreach ministry* is always a good Christian practice.

♦ *Perform random acts of kindness.* Probably all of us have been recipients of random acts of kindness. Performing them for others will make us a little more like Jesus. As you move through the day, be attentive to acts of kindness (e.g., words of affirmation that you can carry out.)

Three traditional Lenten practices to help us on our way

In the Gospel on Ash Wednesday, Jesus will speak to us about prayer, fasting and almsgiving. During his forty days in the desert, he was engaged in extensive prayer and fasting.

Prayer

Prayer is turning to God. It involves making space for God in our lives. Authentic prayer involves “allowing God to have his way with us.” In prayer, we stand, sit or kneel, vulnerable before God, asking him to show us where and how we need conversion and healing in our lives.

Fasting

If Jesus fasted, we need to fast too (unless our doctor tells us not to). Fasting can take many forms: less TV, alcohol, internet, shopping, negative talk. But we should all consider doing *some* form of fasting from *food* (and *sugary drinks*). Food is what Jesus fasted from. We need to experience some hunger in the belly to identify even just a small bit with starving people and to get in touch with the hungers of the soul. Ideally, our fasting is a means to an end. We fast from some shopping so that we may give to the poor. We fast from a half hour of TV to make space for prayer.

Almsgiving

Almsgiving is our way to reach out to the poor by sharing our money, clothing and food. We can give gifts

of food, money and clothing to our *Thrift Store and Social Concerns* office (both located on Aurora Road, a half mile west of U.S.1).

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving—like three legs of a tripod—make up the traditional Lenten practices. Prayer nourishes our spirits. Fasting disciplines our bodies, helps us seek the Lord with greater intensity, and puts us in solidarity with those who suffer. Works of charity enlarge our hearts as we commit ourselves to the good of others. Properly utilized, fasting, prayer and almsgiving can bring about a change of heart. They are not the point of Lent but rather spiritual aids that help us ‘put on Christ’ a little more.

Pope Francis says:

Pope Francis urges us Catholics to pray for the conversion of our hearts and to give up the culture of indifference which is becoming more prevalent. He entreats us: *“During this Lent, then, brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord: Fac cor nostrum secundum cor tuum—Make our hearts like yours. In this way we will receive a heart, which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent, or prey to the globalization of indifference. It is my prayerful hope that this Lent will prove spiritually fruitful for each believer and every ecclesial community.”*

GUIDELINES FOR LENT AND EASTER

**Ash Wednesday and Good Friday
are days of fasting and abstinence.**

All Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence.

Fasting, prayer and almsgiving are the three traditional disciplines of Lent. The faithful and catechumens (unbaptized persons) should undertake these practices seriously in a spirit of penance and in preparation for Baptism or renewal of Baptism at Easter.

Fasting is to be observed by all 18 years of age and older who have not yet celebrated their 59th birthday. On a fast day, one full meal is allowed. Two other meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one’s needs, but together they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted, but liquids, including milk and juices, are allowed.

Abstinence is to be observed by all 14 years of age and older. On days of abstinence, no meat is allowed. Note that when health or ability to work would be seriously affected, the Church does not oblige. When in doubt concerning fasting and abstinence, consult the parish priest.

More words from Pope Francis

The following is taken from a daily reflection called *Pope Francis and the Joy of Family Life*.

Love Makes You Open To Surprises Valentine’s Day (February 14)

True love is both loving and letting oneself be loved. It is harder to let ourselves be loved than it is to love. That is why it is so hard to achieve the perfect love of God, because we can love him. True love is being open to that love which was there first and catches us by surprise.

If all you have is information, you are closed to surprises. Love makes you open to surprises. Love is always a surprise, because it starts with a dialogue between two persons: the one who loves and the one who is loved. We say that God is the God of surprises, because he always loves us first, and he waits to take us by surprise. God surprises us. Let’s allow ourselves to be surprised by God.

- Address, Meeting with Young People, January 18, 2015

Reflection: Are you open to God’s surprises? Take some time to ask him what he wants to surprise you with right now.

Lent—A Time Of Grace

Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each community and every believer. Above all, it is a “time of grace” (2Cor 6:2). God does not ask of us anything that he himself has not first given us. “We love because he first loved us” (1Jn 4:19).

He is not aloof from us. Each one of us has a place in his heart. He knows us by name, he cares for us, and he seeks us out whenever we turn away from him. He is interested in each of us; his love does not allow him to be indifferent to what happens to us.

- Lenten Message, 2015

Reflection: What can you do to renew your family through the Lenten season? What have you done in the past? How has it helped shape your family’s faith? Is there anything else you should do or change?

Have a blessed week,

