

HOMILY ~ MARCH 2, 2022 ASH WEDNESDAY

Today is the first day of Lent, a time of spiritual renewal for the Church. After two years of COVID, I think we need spiritual renewal more than ever. The good news is that cases and hospitalizations are down, and there is just less of the virus out there; I think part of our Lenten renewal is to push ourselves and one another to get back to normal. Try to re-establish old relationships and establish some new ones. All of the isolation has been unhealthy. Our theme for Lent is **“No Greater Love.”** We need to be aware of the love that God has for us and that he continues to walk this journey with us.

We focus upon the three pillars of Lent: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. There are probably things that you do every year; and if you find them helpful, do them again this year. One of the things we have done historically is give up something for Lent, frequently sweets, and then take Sundays off and go back to our old ways on Easter. I am going to suggest that you pick one area in your life that you would like to make a permanent change. When we do something over and over the same way, we develop a habit. Once a habit is established, we do it without thinking about it. We have all probably developed some bad habits unconsciously over the years. So today, make a commitment to establish a new good habit. Let me give you a few examples.

In the area of Prayer, maybe you got out of the habit of going to Mass every weekend. Make a commitment to go to Mass every weekend through Lent and Easter. By the feast of Pentecost, you will have a new healthy habit. Maybe you want to pray for ten minutes every day. If you pray for ten minutes every day through Lent and Easter, particularly if you pray at the same time every day, come Pentecost you will just do it.

In the area of Almsgiving, maybe you want to do an act of random kindness every day. They do not have to be huge things each day, but some of them can be. Maybe give someone a compliment, visit someone who is pretty isolated, call someone that you know is going through a difficult time, make a charitable contribution. Come Pentecost, you will just be in the habit of doing that.

In the area of Fasting, maybe you want to fast from technology for Lent. Before COVID we were limiting the amount of time our children were spending with technology, and I think limiting ourselves as well. COVID forced all of us to increase our screen time. I think it would be a good idea to turn this back! I came across some fasting suggestions from Pope Francis, and I want to share them with you. See if any of these resonate with you:

Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
Fast from complaints, contemplate simplicity.
Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
Fast from bitterness, fill your hearts with joy.
Fast from selfishness and be compassionate.
Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
Fast from words, be silent and listen.

You have to pick what is right for you. I cannot do that for you.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim