

Dear Parishioners,

The injunctions from Jesus in today's gospel: "Give to the one who asks of you; love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you; be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect" sound like a wonderful invitation, so timely, as we are about to begin the Lenten season on Wednesday. Today, I would like to reflect on the importance of Lent and how we are to prepare for greatest Christian celebration of the year: Easter.

We all have a common vocation: to be holy. Even though every day offers us an invitation to holiness, the Lenten season stresses that call through scriptural passages that highlight the urgency of conversion, of returning to the Lord. Lent is thus a period of 40 days of intense preparation for the celebration of the pascal mystery, that is, the passion, death, and resurrection of Our Lord, which is the *raison d'être* of our faith. Easter is so important because all of Christianity revolves around this pascal mystery. Just as the success of an event depends so much on the time put in and the quality of its preparation, to celebrate such a great mystery-event as Easter we ought to put much in spiritual preparation.

Apart from the traditional works of Lent that are: prayer, fasting and charity, according to Catherine Doherty, "Lent is a time of going very deeply into ourselves... What is it that stands between us and God? Between us and our brothers and sisters? Between us and life, the life of the Spirit? Whatever it is, let us relentlessly tear it out, without a moment's hesitation." As individuals and as a community, we can figure out ways of committing or improving what we have committed to do. It is also a time to take up new resolutions, responsibilities; a time to be better and to make our parish better. Things to be considered can be, among others: being faithful to Sunday masses, attending weekday masses whenever possible, volunteering for an activity that will benefit others, regularizing one's situation in the Church, going to the sacrament of reconciliation often, offering holy masses for people and life events, joining a prayer group or apostolate, spending some time before the Blessed Sacrament/adoration, daily family prayer, daily praying of the rosary, getting involved in charitable works, practicing spiritual and corporal works of mercy, etc.

Lent being of sacrifice, many still ask what they can give up during this holy season to help them grow spiritually. Beyond fasting from food, Pope Francis has the following suggestions:

- 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 worries and trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your heart with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

As we begin Lent this week, may we make good use of this precious time when "grace is cheap" and "God is weak."

Fr. Augustin