

## ASH WEDNESDAY – FEBRUARY 14

**“Trace a cross, Lord, not only on our foreheads, but on our hearts...”** That Ash Wednesday prayer echoes the words from the prophet Joel that we will hear this week: “Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord your God.” Whether we see ashes as a reminder of mortality (“Remember that you are dust...”) or a commitment to change our lives (“Repent, and believe in the gospel”), the reception of ashes on our foreheads says that we have made a **conscious and prayerful decision** to enter into the spirit and discipline of Lent with all our heart.

With that in mind, we invite you to begin Lent this Wednesday, March 1st, by coming to church to receive ashes **in the context of prayer**, rather than on the run from home to work to shopping to home again. Lent, like every season of Christian life, demands that we **make time** to acknowledge our absolute dependence on God and on the Christian community in which we most clearly experience the presence of God in our lives. There will be four opportunities for prayer on Ash Wednesday when ashes will be distributed: the **6:30a.m. Communion Service**, a **4:00p.m. Prayer Service**, and **Masses** at **8:30a.m.** and **7:00p.m.** Ashes will be distributed **during** these services and masses – **not** before and **not** after.

As with other sacramentals, ashes do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit as the sacraments do; but, by the Church’s prayer, they **prepare** us to receive grace and help us cooperate with it. If, for some reason you miss receiving ashes this Wednesday, that’s OK. Ashes do not make any of us better Christians; prayer does. If your schedule doesn’t allow you to stay at the mass or the service at least until ashes are distributed, then it’s probably better to make some time to pray on your own and ask the Lord to “trace a cross on my heart”. Then you can take advantage of some of the opportunities offered during the coming weeks of Lent to deepen your relationship with the Lord and with your fellow Christians.

## LENT 2018

**Back to basics** is perhaps the best, or at least the simplest, way to describe how the forty days of Lent should affect the lives of believers. And what are those basics? Jesus himself identifies them in the gospel we hear on Ash Wednesday: “When you **fast**... when you **pray**... when you **give alms**....” Those have long been considered the three “disciplines” of Lent. And discipline is certainly what’s needed if we are to make prayer, fasting and almsgiving as central to our lives as they should be.

**Prayer** grounds us, not only in the discipline of lent, but in every other dimension of Christian life. Lent offers us the opportunity to examine how prayer is woven throughout each moment of life, from the time we wake to the moment we close our eyes in sleep. Does your day begin with prayer, with words of praise for the gift of another dawn? Are prayers of blessing and thanks integral to every meal of the day? Does a prayer of trust acknowledge the Lord’s presence beside you at home or work or school? Does your day end with petition for the needs of the world and prayers of gratitude for the blessings of the day? Do you pray each Sunday with the community and will you take advantage of other opportunities offered by the parish?

**Fasting** is the discipline of Lent that helps us make room in our filled and busy lives for the life that really matters: our life with and in the Lord. Fasting in the Christian tradition has most often been associated with food. But all that the law of the Church demands of us now is that we **fast** (eat less) on only two days each year: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday – and only then if we are of a certain age (those regulations can be found elsewhere in this bulletin). On Ash Wednesday and all the Fridays of Lent, we must **abstain** from meat – again, if we are of a certain age. But if that is the only fasting we embrace during Lent, what are we saying about the importance of our life in and with Jesus? There is probably much more that most of us need to do when it comes to fasting. If food does occupy a central place in life, perhaps the Friday evening **Fish Fry** is for you. But what about fasting from TV or the internet? Abstaining from cigarettes or alcohol? Fasting from laziness or busyness? Abstaining from anger, impatience or gossip? The list could go on and on. Decide this week what fasting or abstaining is needed in your life so you can begin to appreciate the life that really matters, in and with the Lord. You can find the official regulations on fasting and abstinence elsewhere in today’s bulletin.

**Almsgiving** – generosity – is the third discipline of Lent. Like prayer and fasting, it is a basic element of the Christian life year-in and year-out. Almsgiving is **not** what we do with our leftovers, but what we give from the substance of our lives. Almsgiving is what Christians do **before**, not after, their own needs are satisfied; it is the powerful proclamation of trust in the providence of an extravagantly generous and loving God. We're called to give generously and selflessly, not only to our parish community, but to those beyond our parish boundaries who are in need of our care and concern.

Each one of us must decide just how (and how much) prayer, fasting and almsgiving will mark our Lenten journey. But every parish has a responsibility to provide opportunities for the members of the community to live out the disciplines of Lent. Make some or all of them a part of your Lenten journey this year. The Lenten Calendar you will find in this bulletin should also be a great help in planning your schedule around this pivotal season of the Church Year. The calendar is prepared so that you can conveniently post it in a prominent place in your home during these Lenten days.

#### **PRAYER**

**Ash Wednesday - February 14:** Masses will be at **8:30a.m.** and **7:00p.m.**, and there will also be the regular **6:30a.m. Communion Service** and an additional **4:00p.m. Prayer Service**. Ashes will be distributed **during** these masses and services, **not** before and **not** after. Please understand that we can't say exactly when the distribution of ashes will take place at each mass or service.

**Lenten Mission** - Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday, **March 19, 20 & 21** at **7:00p.m.** Our Episcopal Vicar, **Bishop Joseph Perry**, will be with us on **Monday, March 19** to help us celebrate the feast of our patron, St. Joseph, with a Mass and inspirational homily, followed by refreshments in the rear of church. **Deacon James Norman** will speak on **Tuesday, March 20**, inviting us to reflect on the Covenant God has made with us. After more than 30 years, Deacon Jim retired from the Kraft Foods Group in July of 2013 to explore the second half of life focused on family, ministry as an ordained Deacon in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Since 2015, he has served as the Director of Vicariate Operations for the Archdiocese of Chicago working with over 60 churches, 20 grade schools and 13 high schools providing operations, financial and strategic support to meet the needs of the diverse Catholic faith community on the south side of Chicago. Finally, on **Wednesday, March 21**, I will conclude the Mission with a homily focused on the Covenant expressed in the Suffering Servant Songs of the Prophet Isaiah.

**Daily Mass:** Monday thru Friday at **8:30a.m.** and Saturday at **8:00a.m.** There will also be the usual 6:30a.m. Communion Service, Monday thru Saturday. There will NOT be a Wednesday evening Mass as in past years because of the minimal attendance

**Friday Way of the Cross:** From **February 16 through March 23, at 7:00p.m.,** you are invited to walk with Jesus on his journey to Calvary.

**The Sacrament of Penance:** In addition to the regular Saturday time for Confessions—4:30 to 5:00p.m. in the Reconciliation Rooms—there will be additional times to celebrate reconciliation. The date for our **Lenten Communal Penance Service** will take place on **Thursday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>** at 7:00p.m., and the final opportunity for confessions before Holy Week begins will be on **Saturday, March 24<sup>th</sup>**, from 3:30 to 5:00p.m. Please remember that the Sacrament of Penance will not be offered once the Sacred Triduum begins on Holy Thursday evening, March 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **FASTING**

The **Friday Evening Lenten Fish Fry** here at St. Joseph is a wonderful time to join with other parishioners and with guests from surrounding communities to observe the Friday abstinence from meat, and I certainly hope that the gym will be filled on those nights. But also, look again at the section above on *Fasting* and promise yourself that you will do even **more** during these Lenten days to make room in your life for what's truly nourishing and important.

### **ALMSGIVING**

Once again, the focus of parish giving during these Lenten days will be the **Baby Bottle Project** in recognition of the vital work of supporting expectant mothers and safeguarding the sanctity of life for the most vulnerable in our society—the unborn children who need to be welcomed into this world to enjoy the life that we all share in the Lord. Please take those bottles anytime during Lent and return them either on Passion (Palm) Sunday weekend, **March 24-25**, or at the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, **March 29**.

May this coming Lenten Season be a time of refreshment, renewal and deepened commitment to truly live our baptismal promises in the community of the Church and in a world so very much in need of God's love and mercy.

Fr. Bob