

March Chaplain's Report ***Gentlemen...we are at war!***

Today as a Church we enter upon the Holy Season of Lent. Lent marks the period of most intense preparation for Catechumens as they prepare to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter. In solidarity with our fledgling brothers and sisters in Christ, all the Christian faithful are invited to pray and fast alongside them as we prepare ourselves for the renewal of our own Baptismal Promises at Easter.

That being said, most of us probably run head on into Lent without much enthusiasm. There may even be a little pang of regret that we *have to give up something* we like etc. Focusing on the *details* of the day or season can distract us from what is really happening. Our Collect (or Opening Prayer) for Mass on Ash Wednesday is strange and does a good job of helping us see the bigger picture. It reads as follows:

“Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint.”

Words like “***campaign,***” “***battle,***” and “***weapons***” don't immediately sound appropriate for Church but nothing could be further from the truth. Our spiritual life is very much a battle. ***Gentlemen, we are at war!*** The devil is our enemy. He is real and wants nothing more than to see us in hell and separated from God for all eternity with him and his comrades. In his cunning, he will make use not only of external foes to distract and defeat us but will also use those subtler ones found within us as a result of original sin.

Those foes are our natural, but now disordered, desires for comfort, things and self-aggrandizement (pride). They are what St. John calls: the ***lust of the flesh***, the ***lust of the eyes*** and the ***pride of life*** (1 Jn 2:16). These foes would have us forget that we are pilgrims on a journey to our true home: heaven.

In the battle, God doesn't leave us defenseless against these foes. WE can't exactly fight the lust of the flesh with a physical sword and shield, but we do have other weapons at our disposal. These are the weapons of self-restraint mentioned in that Opening Prayer: ***Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving***. Each one is ordered toward combatting and ordering aright a particular interior enemy.

Fasting counteracts the ***lust of the flesh*** or the ***desire for comfort***. Denying ourselves food and feeling the pangs of hunger can help us realize in an intimate way that ***“One does not live on bread alone.”***

Almsgiving counteracts the ***lust of the eyes*** or the ***desire for things***. Offering material support to those in need from our surplus and from what we need sometimes helps us to appreciate that our security and safety comes not from what we have and hold but from God alone, the source of every good thing.

Finally, ***Prayer*** counteracts the pride of life or the desire for self-aggrandizement. G.K. Chesterton once said ***“We become taller when we bow.”*** In the act of prayer, we recognize that God is God and we are not. In God we realize our greatest glory: ***“...the glory of being now called a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for your own possession...”***

As we make our battle plans for Lent, let's take a page out of our Lord's playbook, the Gospel. It'll look different for a working dad

and a priest, a retiree and a student but every effort great or small for the advancement of the Kingdom is precious in God's eyes. Confident of victory in Christ who saves us, let's take up our arms and enter the fray! Remember Gentleman, ***we are at war!***

Practical Tips:

1) Make a Lenten Battle Plan! Consider one way you might exercise each discipline of Lent (prayer, fasting and almsgiving) in a consistent, regular way in the 40 Days ahead.

2) Participate in a Men's Group this Lent. Having accountability in our Lenten observance can be a great help in living it well.

Consider:

- Starting or joining a weekly or biweekly Bible Study.
- See Fr. Matt for more if you don't know where to start.

3) Take part in a public witness with 40 Days for Life.

Combine self-denial and prayer by witnessing in solidarity outside of an abortion clinic in these brutal winter months.

Coming Up:

March

- Stations of the Cross, Penance and Reconciliation
 - o Check the bulletins of St. Robert's and Mt Carmel for dates/times/opportunities.
 - o Our Lady of Czestochowa offers ***daily confession*** during the 11:30AM mass and other times throughout the week too.
- Meatless Fridays and Fasting
 - o As Catholics we have a serious obligation to abstain from meat on Fridays of Lent ***and*** on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday to fast (one full meal

and two smaller meals not equaling the full meal).
The only ones exempt from that obligation are those outside the ages of 18-59 (so, 17 and under, 60 and up – not obliged to fast).

- Solemnities in Lent
 - o The following days may be treated like Sunday; i.e. we would not fast etc.
 - o St. Joseph – Tuesday, March 19, 2019
 - o Annunciation – Monday, March 25, 2019