



The Gift of Lent ... Abstinence ... Almsgiving ... Prayer

The cycle of the Liturgical Calendar offers us the annual *Gift of Lent*. The Season of Lent affords us the opportunity to repent, refocus, reinvigorate our spiritual lives in preparation for the celebration of Easter.

Every year we hear about the three tenets of Lent – Abstinence, Almsgiving and Prayer. What are you giving up this Lent? We are often asked that question by friends and family. The expected answers are usually things that may not be good for us in the first place but have taken over a significant area of our lives. This includes things like smoking, sweets, rich foods, binge watching shows, too much online time, etc.

Pastoral Council
Mission San Antonio de Padua
First Quarter, 2023

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.” Matthew 6:16-18.

While giving up or reducing these distractions in our lives can be good, let's broaden the universe of behaviors we could abstain from that would have a beneficial effect on our lives. We could decide to give up our *pettiness*, our *judgement of and gossip about* others, our *laziness about our spiritual health*. How about the next time we are about to say something derogatory about someone, we *instead* comment on a *good quality* this person has. Next time we're about to complain about something, *instead*, let's thank God for a blessing we have in our lives. Let's improve not only our own attitudes, but also the world around us by concentrating on the *good* instead of the evil. Lent is a gift in that it reminds us of all the blessings we have in our lives. If we were to make a chart of all our blessings and all our challenges, I believe we would ALL find that we have many, many more blessings!

How can we use *Almsgiving* to enrich our Lenten experience? We can give money to worthy causes; we can help the church fulfill their ministerial goals by helping provide the funds. We can go through our closets, our homes, etc. and share from the *plenty* we have stored up.

When my children were small, we were going through their closets and toys one day, deciding what they could *spare and share* with children who had much less. One of my sons asked me if we were poor (I guess I said “no” to a lot of things he wanted us to buy). Before I could even answer, my oldest daughter (only about 6 yrs. old) replied to him, “We are not poor, we have things we can share.” Out of the mouths of babes! We ALWAYS have something to share. Even if we don't have money, or extra clothes, or stuff that we can do without, we can always share of our *time*, our *talents* and the *treasure of who we are as a child of God*.

“. . . all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” James 1:17.

Let's face it, inflation is having a huge impact on all of us. Let's decide to include some new ways of giving this year. Let's take the time to *share our time*. Write a letter (even an email if you can't remember how to compose a letter) to someone, send a card (just because), go visit someone who is homebound, give a break to a caregiver for a few hours, call someone on the phone . . . share our greatest treasure . . . ourselves!

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” Matthew 6:19-21.

Prayer . . . talking to God. The very first wireless connection! Imagine . . . we can talk to the **Creator** without even forming the words. We don't need Verizon, AT & T, or T-Mobile, we don't need internet or the U.S. Postal Dept. All we need to do is to call out to our God with our thoughts, and He is with us. He is *always* with us. Focusing on this amazing reality can enable a powerful spiritual restoration! Talk to God everyday about everything. He wants to hear from us. He wants a relationship with us!

“But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you . . . Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Matthew 6:6-8.

Part of maintaining a healthy relationship is learning to speak and how to listen. If we are doing all the talking, how can we ever expect to hear from God? Let's give God the time and space to speak to us. How many times, in Scripture, do we read about Jesus going away from the crowds, to be alone to commune with his Father?

God is always trying to get through to us, but most often, all he gets is a busy signal from our end. We need to silence our thoughts, our bodies and our phones. As we communicate with our God, our relationship with God grows deeper and stronger, then it becomes more natural for us to have a deeper trust in our God and *His* will in our lives.

“ . . . your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven . . . ” Matthew 6:10.

God is a good Father. He knows us. He loves us.

“ . . . Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself.” Matthew 6:32-34.

Lent is a gift from the Church. It is a season that reminds us to slow down, step apart, and remember that everything *good* we have, comes from God. This includes our lives, our very breath, our faith, our blessings. He gives to us, as conduits to the world, not just in an end to ourselves. How can we better share from our bountiful blessings? We cannot give what we don't have. We need to allow ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit, with God's grace, to be able to share both with others.

As we enter into the season of Lent, let's review our lives, both physically and spiritually. Let us consciously turn toward the Light of Christ. Let us bring our lives, our challenges, our brokenness, our darkness to the cross of Good Friday . . . into the arms of our All-loving Messiah who offers His Sacrificial, Transformative, Undeserved, Grace-filled, Perfect Love . . . and we can rejoice with Savior God at the empty tomb of Easter Sunday!

By Joan Steele, Mission Administrator & Parish Catechetical Leader

GRACE

Growing up I often heard the phrase "there but for the grace of God go I". I am not sure where I first heard it or how it came to be so important to me or when I took it up as my daily mantra. I just think it helped to keep me grounded, centered, on how blessed I am and have always been. I used to hate seeing interviews of people who had faced some disaster and hear them say 'why me?'. I used to think, 'why NOT me' and then I would immediately thank God for the grace that was given to me. I never earned it or really did anything of merit to deserve it, but I claim God's grace by faith.

Our Catholic Catechism defines grace as "favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to His call to become children of God... Grace is the participation in the life of God... **the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of His own life**... grace escapes our experience and cannot be known except by faith...."

A pleasing illustration of this attitude is found in the reply of St. Joan of Arc to a question posed as a trap by her ecclesiastical judges: Asked if she knew that she was in God's grace, she replied: 'If I am not, may it please God to put me in it: if I am, may it please God to keep me there.' (Acts of the Trial of St. Joan of Arc. CCC sections 1996 - 2005)

Grace so strong, so generously given that even as my sins nailed His hands and feet to a cross, He forgave me and He rose for me so that I could live in His grace and be assured of the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Thank you, Jesus.

Georgia

EXCEPT FOR GRACE Song Writer: Jeff Silvey

You've lost it all, your dignity and pride.
A sinking soul swim in the tears you cried.
Alone and hopeless without a word to say,
Cause guilt has taken it all away.

Except for grace and your faith
And knowing that God's love will forgive mistakes,
There's nothing that can clear your painful past,
Bear your bitter pain, or could ever take your place,
Except for grace!

We've all stood right where you're at,
Facing the shame of failures and regrets,
Leaving us empty, broken, and afraid to dream
Cause sin has stripped us clean of everything.

Except for grace and our faith,
And knowing that God's love will forgive mistakes.
There's nothing that can clear our painful pasts,
Bear our bitter pain, or will ever take our place
Except for grace!

The price is much too high for us to ever pay,
We could try forever and find no other way!

Except for grace and our faith,
And knowing that God's love will forgive mistakes.
There's nothing that can clear our painful pasts,
Bear our bitter pain, or will ever take our place
(Nothing else will take our place)
Except for grace!
Except for grace!

Outreach Ministry

Mission San Antonio de Padua supports several outreach programs. We are looking for someone to help us grow this ministry. It won't take a lot of time; you do not need any training and you will be answering God's call to minister to your brothers and sisters.

Programs:

Communion Service for the Homebound: Please let us know if you need communion brought to you. Receiving the Eucharist is fundamental to our Catholic beliefs.

Prayer Circle: Are you willing to pray for those in need? Do you need special prayer? The prayer circle is a great way to reach out and reach up! You don't need to be able to travel; prayer requests can be shared within the group via the telephone or email. A scheduled prayer time of 8 a.m., 12 noon and 8 p.m. unites those offered prayers. Join in any time or all times to add your united voice of prayer for those in our parish family who are in need.

Meals during a family illness/hospitalization: Would you be able to provide a meal for someone who is in need? Are you in need of some help while you deal with health issues?

Carpooling services for Mass: If you need a ride to Mass or if you can provide a ride, this might be the ministry for you.

Want to help in other ways? We are always looking for volunteers to help in the Padre's Garden, Clean the church or work on our necessary fund raisers. Call the Mission for more ideas.

If you are interested in lending a hand or would like to be remembered in any of these ministries, please contact Joan at the office.

Mission San Antonio

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