

2017

- Well...Lent begins this Wednesday—Ash Wednesday. Be sure to check the bulletin for the schedule of the various Lenten activities and events.
- Of course, several things mark our observance of Lent...which is a season of self-examination, penance and conversion.
- No Gloria or alleluia from Ash Wednesday until the Easter Vigil, unless it's a feast day of some sort.
- Back to violet—the color of penitence. No flowers except on Laetare Sunday—the 4th Sunday of Lent, and on feasts...because it's "out to the desert" we go to accompany Our Lord for forty days.
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- Remember that Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are the only two days of both fasting and abstinence from meat we have during the year. Each Friday during Lent is a day of abstinence from meat.
- Why fasting and abstinence? We read in Canon Law: *"In order for [the Church] to be united...by some common observance of penance...especially by observing fast and abstinence..."* (Canon 1249).
- Fasting on Ash Wednesday & Good Friday is obligatory from age 18 until age 59. When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. Pregnant women do not have to fast, but if they don't, they should substitute some other form of self-denial.
- Sodas, tea, coffee, etc., are okay anytime during fasting, but not something heavy and meal-like, like a milkshake.
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- Abstinence from meat on Ash Wednesday, and all Fridays during Lent is binding from age 14 onwards...people w/ relevant medical conditions excluded, including pregnant women.
- Actually, the Church has never rescinded the discipline of ALL Fridays being days of universal abstinence, but the U.S. Bishops back in the 70's declared that the rule was no longer binding under pain of sin, so it was pretty much ignored after that.

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- Yet the Bishops maintained that Fridays should still have for each person some sort of penitential sacrifice if not abstinence from meat.
- With abstinence milk and eggs are okay. Even condiments like light gravy or broth, or meat used to flavor cooking, like beans. The intention of abstinence is that meat not be a substantial portion of the dish.
- But we should look at the spirit of fasting and abstinence and follow it wholeheartedly, rather than to seek some technicality “exceptions”. Are we so weak as to be unable to deny ourselves a little for even a day? I think not.
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- Why do we fast and abstain? For self-denial and penance, yes...but mostly to remind us of the temporary nature of the material. We eat, and are hungry again...we drink, but thirst again.
- But, when we consume things of the Spirit...as Jesus assures us: “*I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.*” (John 6:35)
- In the Mass especially we drink in His holy Word...we consume the Eucharist which is His eternal Being—the sustenance of spiritual truth.
- The more we cling to the flesh and the things of the flesh, the less we are able to grasp the spiritual realm to which God calls us.
- This is, I think, what Jesus is talking about most of all in our Gospel today—not so much that our bodies do not need material sustenance, but rather the spirit—the soul—receives its “food” directly from God through the sacraments, through prayer, and through works of charity.

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- Through our communal Lenten observances we renew our dedication to follow Jesus, Our Lord, together in the cleansing barrenness of the desert of self-denial—a barrenness which minimizes distraction from the spiritual life by separating us at least

a little from material clutter...as we look towards His saving sacrifice upon the cross and His resurrection to life at Easter.

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- The desert, or separation from the constant harangue of material desires, has always been recognized in many faiths as the place of pilgrimage seeking greater spiritual fulfillment.
- This is why Jesus tells us today: “*No one can serve two masters*”—both God and material wealth...for while creation is good, love of created things can easily become idolatry.
- The true Christian lives in the world and simply utilizes what God gives for the betterment of both his own spirit, and the spiritual edification of those around him...knowing that he is IN the world, but not to be OF the world.
- ...recalling the prayer in the book of Proverbs: “*...give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’*” (Proverbs 30:8-9)...and from Sirach: “*“The essentials for life are water and bread and clothing and a house to cover one's nakedness.”*” (Sirach 29:21-23).
- I might add “*a church for sacraments and worship*”. These are what we ask when we pray: “*Give us this day our daily bread...*”
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- The LA Monitor is coming out soon with a whole section called: “Coping”—a list of such counselors, psychologists and the like. Yet, the further our society moves away from God and His instruction to us, the more it will need such things.
- We would very likely be able to do without the majority of those if we would only simplify and seek God and His grace...
- ...because, as our psalm today proclaimed: “*Only in God is my soul at rest; from him comes my salvation.*”
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- So dare to trust Jesus. Dare to walk with Him with whole heart. As Isaiah tells us again today: “*Can a mother forget her infant, be*

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without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.”

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- Will we choose our road by the ease of travel...even to a dead end. Or will we rather choose our road because of where it leads?
- And thus, we again recall that beautiful poem of Robert Frost—so applicable to our spiritual lives:
 - *I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Reading 1 [IS 49:14-15](#)

Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me;
my LORD has forgotten me."
Can a mother forget her infant,
be without tenderness for the child of her womb?
Even should she forget,
I will never forget you.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 62:2-3, 6-7, 8-9](#)

R/ (6a) **Rest in God alone, my soul.**
Only in God is my soul at rest;
from him comes my salvation.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed at all.
R/ **Rest in God alone, my soul.**
Only in God be at rest, my soul,
for from him comes my hope.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed.
R/ **Rest in God alone, my soul.**
With God is my safety and my glory,
he is the rock of my strength; my refuge is in God.
Trust in him at all times, O my people!
Pour out your hearts before him.
R/ **Rest in God alone, my soul.**

Reading 2 [1 COR 4:1-5](#)

Brothers and sisters:
Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ
and stewards of the mysteries of God.
Now it is of course required of stewards
that they be found trustworthy.
It does not concern me in the least
that I be judged by you or any human tribunal;
I do not even pass judgment on myself;
I am not conscious of anything against me,
but I do not thereby stand acquitted;
the one who judges me is the Lord.
Therefore do not make any judgment before the appointed time,
until the Lord comes,
for he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness
and will manifest the motives of our hearts,
and then everyone will receive praise from God.

Gospel MT 6:24-34

Jesus said to his disciples:

“No one can serve two masters.
He will either hate one and love the other,
or be devoted to one and despise the other.
You cannot serve God and mammon.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,
what you will eat or drink,
or about your body, what you will wear.
Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?
Look at the birds in the sky;
they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns,
yet your heavenly Father feeds them.
Are not you more important than they?
Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?
Why are you anxious about clothes?
Learn from the way the wild flowers grow.
They do not work or spin.
But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor
was clothed like one of them.
If God so clothes the grass of the field,
which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow,
will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?
So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’
or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’
All these things the pagans seek.
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.
Sufficient for a day is its own evil.”