

Journeying through Lent, 2021

at St. Lawrence the Martyr

Ash Wednesday, February 17th, marks the beginning of the solemn penitential season of Lent, our Church's annual opportunity to seek the Lord's mercy and be renewed in mind and heart as we anticipate the mysteries of Holy Week and Easter. The continuing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the way we observe the season this year (as it did last year), but the Lord's invitation remains the same: "Repent, and believe in the Good News!"

May God grant us a spirit of openness and docility in approaching this Lent, so that we might turn away from sin, cling more tightly to the Gospel, and celebrate the wonder of Christ's resurrection with joy as never before.

Ash Wednesday, February 17th

Join us for one of four liturgies on this singularly penitential day of the Church year. Mass will be celebrated at **9:00 AM** and again at **7:00 PM**. A Liturgy of the Word, which does not include the reception of Holy Communion, will take place at **12 noon** and again at **4:00 PM**. Ashes will be blessed and distributed **at all four liturgies**. Some things to note:

- ❖ Since we must continue to maintain proper social distance in the church and carefully monitor the number present at any given liturgy, we are making plans for an "overflow service" (if needed) in the school gym at 4:20. The service in the gym will take place **ONLY** if seating in the church has reached capacity (about 165 people).
- ❖ Despite what many people believe, Ash Wednesday is **not** a holy day of obligation; receiving ashes is not required of any Catholic, even if this were an "ordinary" year.
- ❖ In view of the COVID pandemic, the Diocese has issued specific guidelines as to HOW ashes will be distributed this year. **The priest or minister will not be tracing a cross on anyone's forehead, which would require touching him or**

her. Instead, the minister will sprinkle a tiny pinch of ashes on the top of your head. Believe it or not, this has been the common practice for centuries in Europe and many other parts of the world, including Rome and at the Vatican. Fr. Brian and Deacon Patrick will explain the procedure for receiving ashes in greater detail at the liturgies themselves.

Fast and Abstinence

For centuries, and following the teaching of Jesus, the Church has called her children to engage in bodily penance during Lent. This consists primarily in the practices of fasting and abstinence. The current Church guidelines are as follows:

All Catholics, 14 years of age and older, are obliged to **abstain entirely from meat** on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all the Fridays of Lent.

In addition, all Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59, inclusive, are obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (April 2nd). This means limiting oneself to a **single full meal for the entire day, and avoiding any food between meals.** Two other light meals, which together would not equal a full meal, may be taken during the day. Those whose work or health would be in any way impaired by fasting and abstinence are excused from the practice. One's individual conscience should decide when there is a significant reason to excuse oneself. A more serious reason is required to excuse oneself from fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday or Good Friday.

Stations of the Cross

Though believers can meditate on the Lord's suffering and death any day of the year, Lent is an especially appropriate time to enter into this journey of divine Self-sacrifice. The Stations can of course be prayed in private, whether at home or in church. But as in past years, a communal service will take place in church **each of the Fridays of Lent at 7:00 PM.**

We are recording two services for our YouTube channel: one for adults, which will include Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and a second service designed to be especially meaningful to children. Please go to our YouTube channel by clicking the link toward the bottom of the website's homepage.

Weather permitting, the Stations also will be prayed **outdoors**, moving from place to place around the parish grounds, beginning at 12 noon on Good Friday.

Finally, a communal service of the Stations will also take place the evening of Good Friday, at 7:30 PM.

"The Search"

Many of us look forward to a parish retreat or "Mission" during Lent. We did have a Lenten retreat scheduled for three evenings in March, but it's been postponed till next year because of the COVID pandemic. However, Bishop Barres has arranged for a Diocese-wide retreat opportunity, revolving around "**The Search.**" "The Search" is a beautifully produced 7-part video series by nationally known Catholic speaker and author, Chris Stefanick. **It is available for free** to anyone with a subscription to FORMED.org (and *every member* of our parish has a subscription—you just have to sign up!).

In addition to the 7-part series, which challenges us to ask the most fundamental questions about why we exist, where we're going, and how can we know there's a God, Chris Stefanick will be hosting interviews with Catholic leaders around the country—including our own Bishop Barres on March 31st.

By a special arrangement, "The Search" will also be available on our diocesan TV station, the **Catholic Faith Network** (CFN - Optimum channel 29) for those without internet access. More information will be available in the bulletin, and on the website.

"The Search" is not meant just to be watched . . . and it's certainly not meant to be watched alone. That's why we are seeking to form a virtual group—to watch, discuss, and truly *grow* from the experience. **Virtual one-hour Zoom meetings will be held on the four Saturdays in March at 11:00 AM.** It is necessary to register. If interested, please call the Office of Faith Formation at 631-589-3160. Of course, it is perfectly acceptable if you prefer watching the episodes on your own or with your family. The series is truly remarkable! Watch the trailer to get a glimpse at <https://player.vimeo.com/video/446879132>



Other Lenten Resources

With each passing year, the number of resources one can turn to for study, education, and inspiration during the Lenten season continues to grow. Don't be overwhelmed! Best to choose one or two, and try to remain faithful in using it throughout the length of the season. If a particular book or video series is not as nourishing as you might have hoped, don't hesitate to switch to something different. Some possibilities to explore:

1. **"Little Black Book"** - On the First Sunday of Lent we will be distributing copies of the very popular Little Black Book, published each year by the Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan. It contains brief reflections for each day of the season, coupled with interesting tidbits about the saints and our Catholic tradition. Our gift to St. Lawrence parishioners. (One copy per household, please.)

2. **"Best Lent Ever"** - Dynamic Catholic, the very successful print and online organization headed by Matthew Kelly, offers brief daily video reflections for the Lenten season. Go to www.dynamiccatholic.com to sign up.

Dynamic Catholic is also promoting a book entitled, *I Thirst*, a collection of meditations for each of the forty days of Lent, based on the reflections of St. Theresa of Calcutta.

3. **The Augustine Institute** - Similar in format to “Best Lent Ever,” Dr. Timothy Gray of the Augustine Institute will offer daily reflections on the Scripture readings for the Lenten season. The Augustine Institute also produces FORMED, the online library of talks, Scripture studies, films, video series, etc. **to which every St. Lawrence parishioner already has a free subscription!** Go to www.formed.org/lent to sign up for the daily reflections.

4. **Word on Fire** - Bishop Robert Barron of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles has become perhaps the leading Catholic evangelist in the United States today. The online organization he founded, Word on Fire, offers a wide variety of resources, both in print, audio and video, including **a free copy** of the Bishop’s excellent Lenten Gospel Reflections. Go to www.wordonfire.org