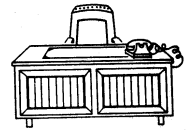


# 1st Sunday of Lent

March 10, 2019



From the Desk of  
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners,

## Lenten Reflection:

The season of Lent began on Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday comes from the ancient practice of placing ashes on the forehead as a sign of repentance and humility before God. It is associated with the grief and death brought about by sin. The smudge of ashes on the forehead said a lot about us as we headed to work and carried on with daily activities on Ash Wednesday.

There is nothing glamorous about ashes on the forehead. Its appeal comes from the shape it takes. The cross on our forehead is a powerful statement about our identity as people redeemed by the cross of Christ. Moreover, it is an invitation to carry our crosses with patient endurance. In itself, the cross was both detested and detestable as a horrific ancient form of punishment used by the Roman authorities. The beauty of the cross derives from the glory of the resurrection.

“Repent, and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15), was one of the formulas for the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday. With these words, we began our Lenten journey in the wilderness of life. The Lenten season evokes the image of a rigorous spiritual journey involving forty days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Originally, Lent was solely a period of preparing catechumens for baptism at the Easter vigil. Over the years, the entire community became involved in the preparation for the celebration of the Easter resurrection of Christ. The word itself is of German origin *lente* meaning “spring season.” We know that spring is a time most people do thorough house cleaning. Likewise, lent is a time we do thorough spiritual house cleaning in anticipation of the Easter glory, that is, Christ’ resurrection. In Latin, Lent is translated by the word *quadagesima*, which itself means “fortieth.” It is a reference to the forty days of Lent.

Lent is a wilderness experience. The wilderness is a harsh environment capable of pushing people to the limits of human endurance. Surviving in the wilderness requires every skill at one’s disposal. Likewise, Lent will test the limits of our endurance. The disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving will challenge us every step of this journey.

During Lent, God calls us to thorough self-examination, which is an indispensable part of true conversion. As hard as it might be to turn away from sin, the Church encourages us with biblical narratives of people who have done it long before us. The forty days of Lent is reminiscent of the forty years journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land (Deut. 8:2). It also reminds us of the forty days given the people of Nineveh to repent or face severe consequences for their sinful ways (Jonah 3:4). As today’s gospel reminds us, the forty days represent the forty days Jesus spent in the desert in preparation of his temptation by the devil (Luke 4:2).

The Lenten call for conversion is rooted in the love of God than in the fear of punishment. Sin leads to separation at three levels: from God, from other people (the Church) and from our true selves. It leads to spiritual death for those who refuse to heed the call for conversion and reconciliation. Through Jesus, we have come to know God as loving, compassionate, and forgiving. Like the people of Nineveh, we plead for God’s mercy and forgiveness and have no doubt that he is capable of expunging our sins and reconciling us at all three levels.

Believing in the gospel entails listening attentively to the word of God proclaimed, understanding the word proclaimed, and modeling our lives on it. Lent is a special time to put the gospel message into action. It might be worthwhile to identify a particular weakness to work on. One could choose to work on patience, forgiveness, being less judgmental, empathizing more with others, etc. It is not enough to talk the talk; we must be willing to walk the walk.

Wishing everyone a holy Lent!

Fr. Romanus