

Bulletin Article 1

The Season of Lent

We will begin the Lenten Season on Ash Wednesday February 22nd. While many look forward to this time for opportunities for spiritual growth and renewal, quite often many of us see it as a liturgical season to dread. We focus on “What am I going to give up?” “How long can I live without whatever it is I am going to give up?” “How many more days before I don’t have to give up whatever it is that I am giving up?” Who wouldn’t dread a liturgical season with such a narrow focus?

Over these next few weeks, we are all encouraged to begin reflecting anew on the real purpose of Lent, the power such a season can be for us, and the real potential for a deeper commitment to our Catholic faith, and most important, a deeper communion of love with God. Such a deeper understanding could give us a new attitude for Lent.

Baptism is one of Lent’s foundational focus. At the Easter Vigil, the catechumens (referred to as “the elect”) will be fully initiated as Catholics through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

It is no coincidence that on Easter Sunday, all the baptized will renew our baptismal promises. Note that I said we are going to “renew” our baptismal promises and not merely “repeat” them. “Repeating” simply recalls something that happened in the past. “Renew” is entirely different. “Renewing” our baptismal promises recognizes something still foundational in our life.

Renewing our baptismal promises opens our hearts to God’s grace. Grace reveals God’s great love for us and God’s purpose for our life. This great divine love energizes our own love and leads us to a deeper commitment to live these promises more faithfully. Easter is one time in the liturgical year for us to remember that we are baptized once *for a lifetime* and not merely once *in a lifetime*. Lent is the time set aside to prepare us to make that renewal faithfully.

Our world, our country and our Church all need us to rediscover the beauty and power of baptism and our call to be co-redeemers with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our baptism calls us to a life of holiness that reveals Jesus’ great and merciful love to all humanity and all creation. Our faith also commits us to restoring the human community and all creation to a life of justice, peace, and solidarity.

In the next article, we will continue this opportunity to renew our understanding of Lent so that we can more fully renew our baptismal promises at Easter.

Bulletin Article 2

The Season of Lent

The previous article offered a renewed understanding of Lent; giving us a new attitude different from “dreading the Lenten Season” for one that welcomes Lent’s spiritual renewal and deepening faith. We were reminded that at Easter we *renew* our baptismal promises and *not repeat* them. We are baptized *once for a lifetime* and not merely baptized *once in a lifetime*. Lent is that time set aside by the Church for us to prepare to renew these baptismal promises.

Each time we enter a Catholic Church, we bless ourselves with holy water. Making the sign of the cross, we remember that we are baptized into the life of the Trinitarian God. We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit living a perfect communion of love. Our fidelity to baptism’s grace draws us more and more into that divine communion of love. Through the Risen Christ, we become more divine by becoming more the person God created us to be.

Baptism is not only a great gift from God for each of us personally. Our baptism is a gift to all humanity. We are not baptized only for ourselves. We are baptized for others. In fact we are baptized for all people. Our baptism commits each and all of us to help others come to know the great divine love in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are now in the third year of a deep economic recession with accompanying huge unemployment and poverty rates. Huge unemployment has decreased revenues to all levels of government while raising needs to provide basic necessities to more and more people.

We see levels of anger and hostility dividing people along political party and ideological lines. A free and open democracy always generates strong and passionate debate and argument. But lately, the depth of political discourse has descended to levels of ugliness and gridlock unseen in recent American history.

There is growing concern regarding environmental degradation. For many countries in the third world, once fertile farmlands have dissolved into dusty wastelands from lengthy and severe droughts not seen in many years. This is one of many reasons why massive numbers of people have moved from rural areas seeking help in growing urban centers.

The Catholic Church has spoken out strongly on all these issues, ***all these issues***. These teachings are neither new nor trendy, but ancient and foundational to who we are as Catholics. They flow from our realization that God is the Creator of everything and there is a moral law to creation. The “common good” is a foundational divine law of creation. This law teaches us that God has provided for the basic needs of all humanity without exception. If people’s basic needs are not being met, then the common good must be restored for God’s purpose. We as the baptized have a responsibility for this restoration of the common good.

This Lent, through many methods of teaching (bulletins, homilies, catechetical materials, family prayer) we will come to learn what Catholic social teaching is, and why it is at the core of who we are as Catholics and not something on the fringes of our teachings. We will focus primarily on papal teaching because popes since Pope Leo XIII in 1891 have placed Catholic social teaching at the center of Catholic identity. The Second Vatican Council embraced and solidified these teachings. We will bring their teachings to our parish level.

Parish Bulletin Article 3

The Season of Lent

For the previous two articles, this column has offered a deeper understanding of the Lenten Season through a deeper understanding of our baptism. The Triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) welcomes and draws us into divine passionate love and perfect communion of life. This communion also unites us to all humanity and all creation. Our baptism commits us to sharing this divine love and communion with all. Lent prepares us to renew our baptismal promises at Easter.

Catholic social teaching is at the core of our identity as God's People. The "common good" is a divine law of creation recognizing that God has provided for the basic human needs of all people. When people are denied their basic human needs, creation is distorted. We call this distortion "sin". As God's People, we are responsible for restoring creation to its divine intention.

The Lenten Season is also a season especially for the catechumens. Now officially designated as The Elect, Lent is their final time of spiritual preparation before entering into the full sacramental life at the Easter Vigil. **The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults** designates three Scrutiny Rites as a major component of their Lenten journey. For the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, we celebrate these "scrutinies" for the elect.

What are the "scrutinies?" The RCIA describes them as "rites for self-searching and repentance and above all a spiritual purpose. The scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong and good. For the scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them against temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life."(#141)

The Catholic faithful are called to walk with the elect in their journey of spiritual cleansing and growth. Through the ancient penitential practices of prayer, fasting, and charitable works, we search our own hearts and souls for those areas of darkness still in need of God's bountiful mercy and healing. As the elect pray that their sins and weaknesses be removed to embrace the life of faith, so we make the same journey, removing any spiritual darkness in our own lives. At Easter the whole Church stands renewed in the waters and the promises of baptism for our salvation and the salvation of the world.

The Church calls us to extend this moral evaluation to our society, culture and nation. Every nation, culture and society has their own strengths, virtues, and cultural expressions that build dignity into the human community. As the RCIA states, "bring out, then strengthen all that is upright strong and good". Every one of these same nations and cultures, contains cultural symbols and messages that tear at human dignity and break down human communities. Again from the RCIA, "uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful..."

[Subsequent articles could address Catholic social teaching as a guide to spiritual cleansing, conversion and renewed faith or a similar topic.]