

St. Francis of Assisi Parish Ann Arbor.

February 2, 2021

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Well, here we are again on the cusp of another Lenten season. Feb 17 is Ash Wednesday and marks the beginning of another 40-day pilgrimage of penance, prayer and conversion. Now I know that the past 12 months have been challenging for all of us. The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly impacted our lives and caused great distress and grief for so many. Indeed, one friend of mine has referred to it as *“the longest Lent ever.”* While those challenges have been real, we have also learned a lot about ourselves and what is truly important in life. These lessons are reminders to us that on life’s journey, with all its ups and downs, we are never alone, never left to our own devices and never without God’s grace. That alone should give us hope!

Pope Francis recently commented that *“our lives are interwoven with and sustained by ordinary people valiantly shaping the decisive events of our shared history: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caretakers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests and religious men and women and so very many others”*-many motivated by the Spirit of God often without even realizing it. ([On Fraternity and Social Friendship](#))



In times of struggle, faith often grows stronger as we re-discover our own vulnerability and come to realize that no one person has all the answers and that we must ultimately turn to God, the source of all meaning and wisdom. Lent is one of those **“turning moments”** – a 40-day pilgrimage to allow our lives to be filled anew with God’s presence and strength.

But it is clear that we are not the people we were twelve months ago- life has certainly changed in many ways. But along the way we have gained or perhaps regained several perspectives on life and what is truly important. Here are a few suggestions that you may wish to reflect in the coming days:

A new perspective on family life. With all the restrictions, many folks have found new opportunities for spending time with family and friends. Husbands and wives have talked more deeply, and parents have found time to play with and listen to their children. So, as we return to normality, what can we all do to protect that time and not to lose its joys?

A deeper sense of communion and community. Most of us think of “*communion*” as something we receive and so it is- the Eucharist is the greatest gift that God has given us. But communion is also that holy web of relationships that unite us-to and through Christ-with one another. In one way, that sense of community has taken a battering because of social distancing, quarantining and the general fear that others might bring us the virus, but in another way, as I noted above, we have seen a renewed commitment by many to serve and to be there for others. I have noted this in a particular way here at St. Francis as we struggle to keep our parish open and our ministries vibrant. To all who have stepped forward, I express my deep gratitude and my hope that this renewed sense of community will continue.

But I also am reminded that our Christian faith cannot be quarantined, or our mission put on hold indefinitely. We cannot allow fear to dominate our world or our lives to the point that we become silent and inactive. Like the farmer in the Gospel parable who sent out to sow the seed, we are called to be a people of hope and faith- two commodities that are often in short supply at the moment!

A greater respect for the gift of life. As the pandemic has unfolded, we have grieved the loss of so many friends and family. Here in the US, we are steadily heading to over 500,000 souls lost to the virus- so much grief and pain! Much has been written and said about the need to protect one another and especially the elderly and most vulnerable among us. Yet, it seems incredible that having gone through all of this, we should not have learned the lesson that all life is sacred- from the first moment of conception to natural death, and that all life, irrespective of race, color or creed is to be cherished and protected.

So as we embark on our Lenten journey, we have chosen the following quote from the prophet Jeremiah to guide our Lenten pilgrimage in these pandemic days: “For I will restore your health; I will heal your wounds, says the Lord.” (Jer 30:17) As you can see, it speaks of healing and restoration, which are at the heart of our Lenten prayer.

In addition to many familiar times for prayer and events, we have added two other opportunities for weekly Masses- Sundays at 5pm and Tuesdays at 5pm.

- ***Ash Wednesday-*** Masses at 7am, 9:15am, 12:15pm and 7pm. Please note that Ashes will be distributed during Mass in the Church and after the 9:15am and 7pm Masses on the piazza in front of the Church.
- ***Weekend Masses during Lent-*** Saturday at 5pm, 7pm (Spanish), Sunday, 8:30am, 10:30am, 12:30pm and 5pm. Please remember to sign up online to attend our weekend Masses.
- ***Daily Masses during Lent-*** at 9:15am Mon-Fri and at 5pm on Tuesdays of Lent.

Lenten Prayer Times/Stations of the Cross at SFA

- ***Thursdays of Lent-*** in addition to our regular all-day adoration on Thursdays, we will offer a time of prayer, scripture and music from 6:30pm to 7pm. Details will be published in the bulletin/webpage each week.
- ***Fridays of Lent-*** Stations of the Cross are led by parishioners, members of the Pastoral Team and various ministries, beginning at 7pm.
- ***Mondays of Lent-*** Las Estaciones de la Cruz comenzarán a las 7pm en la iglesia. (Stations of the Cross in Spanish begin at 7pm in the main Church).

Reconciliation/Penance at SFA

- In addition to our regular Saturday afternoon Confessions from 3:30pm to 4:30pm, we are offering the following extra times:
 - Wednesday, March 3 and 10 from 2:00pm to 4pm
 - Thursday, March 11 and 18 during our weekly Holy Hour
 - Saturday, March 13 and 20 from 11am to 12 noon
 - Tuesday, March 30, from 7pm to 8pm
 - *Please Note- No Confessions on Holy Saturday*

Holy Week Celebrations at SFA

For those who like to plan ahead, here is what we are planning for Holy Week and Easter Sunday.

Holy Thurs Mass of the Lord's Supper 7pm
Night Prayer at 11pm in the PAC

Good Friday 12 noon Service- Stations of the Cross
Veneration of the Cross 1:30pm
Quiet Prayer before the Cross 3pm to 7pm
Bilingual (Spanish) Evening Prayer/Tenebrae 7pm

Holy Saturday Blessing of Food 12 noon
Easter Vigil: 8:00pm

Easter Sunday Masses at 7am, 8:30am, 10:30am and 12:30am and 2pm
(Spanish)

Byzantine Vespers

Many in our parish community belong to one of the other rites of the Catholic Church. This year St. Francis Parish is joining with St. Stephen Byzantine Parish from Allen Park to celebrate Vespers ***each Sunday evening of Lent at 7pm in the Church.*** All are welcome to join in this time of prayer and to experience the beauty of the Eastern Catholic Tradition.

Holy Land Christians

Each year on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, we take up a collection for the Christian communities in the Holy Land. Caught between two powerful groups the Christian community struggles to remain a vibrant force for peace and a living witness to the fact that Christ himself chose this land for the great plan of redemption. Your gift will help with this laudable goal.

Diocese of Kottapuram

Once again, we are partnering with the diocese of Kottapuram, India as part of our Lenten giving. Over the past six years, we have enriched each other spiritually by sharing not just our material blessing but more importantly our Lenten prayers. Lenten sacks will again be available in the Church, beginning February 13/14 and I hope that you will join us in sharing with those who are less fortunate in the world. For an update on the work of KIDS- Kottapuram Integrated Development Society- see our parish website:

www.stfrancisa2.com/lenten-almsgiving/

Year of St. Joseph

On December 8, the Holy Father inaugurated a year in honor St. Joseph, foster-father of Jesus and spouse of the Virgin Mary- to run until December 2021. It's a great opportunity for our parish community to invoke this great saint, who committed his life to the Lord and the fulfillment of the plan of salvation. We will celebrate this year with the addition of a new icon for our Church, and by many other events and prayer times. We have added a new page to our website with lots of information and prayers, and with details of our planned pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. Joseph, Grass Lake on March 16.

<https://www.stfrancisa2.com/year-of-st-joseph/>

So, as we prepare for Lent, I hope that you will take advantage of some of these events to help you along the way. Once, again I remind you that while the obligation to attend Sunday Mass has been temporarily suspended, the sacred obligation to keep the Sabbath holy, as commanded in the Ten Commandments, is still in place.

Likewise, the obligation to join us on the journey of Lent remains in force. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday remain days of fast and abstinence and the Fridays of Lent are days for all of us to do a special Lenten activity.

Once again, be assured that you and your loved ones are in our prayers and thoughts, and that our hope is that all of us will know the blessings of this holy season of Lent, and the joy of the Easter mystery.

Yours in Christ.

Fr. James

<https://www.stfrancisa2.com/>