

Living the Spirit
About These Writings
Lent 2015

As we approach Lent I have thought it is time to write about my writing these inserts for the bulletin. It is my intention to put on our website a few more writings about Lenten themes. It may happen that all of them will not be printed out in paper. I urge you to use the parish website to find what may interest you. I find it best to go to the home page of the site to find the list of many previous inserts. You will find some from the past. They may be especially helpful to grow in our knowledge and understanding and practice of our faith during the Lenten season.

I am finding it difficult to write much new about the usual themes as I did for so many years. I have thought that I may simply write at times about my own thoughts, and find in them some spiritual message to share. I must confess that growing old is accompanied by diminishing powers at every level. Yet I shall try, if only to exercise both my mind and heart. It is my desire that everything I write speak of love for God with all that comes with that love – adoration, thanksgiving, contrition, forgiveness and mercy, and even petition.

+

I am sure you know that Lent can be a time for spiritual growth. The Church traditionally urges us to pray, fast and do good works of charity at this time. Spiritual writers value all these as being necessary to live the Spirit. I have always found that we do best to begin with rather ordinary or customary ways to live these actions. We pray best when we allow ourselves to speak from our hearts to God. We also must allow ourselves to pray as part of the Church. During Lent we may work on how we pray at Mass. So often we think of our Sunday obligation as a necessary penance. If we pray at Mass – trying to avoid distractions or improper attitudes—we pray well. Then our efforts at being with God in communicating our desires are joined with those of the entire Church.

I often wonder why it is that we are finding in our parishes a great desire to leave Mass as quickly as possible. Perhaps it is because we forget that Jesus is always present in our churches. He is there in His sacramental presence. He awaits our coming, and no doubt would bless our leaving with a heart renewed in grace and love for Him. [The blessing at the end of Mass really is a farewell gift of Jesus to us.]

I want to mention to you, as I would in a conversation, how many resources there are for Lent. There are many good spiritual books which are attractive to our personal situations. We also can find some presentations on EWTN or the Catholic Channel to arouse in us a desire to be true apostles of the evangelization we are called to embrace. I wish I could give you some of my spiritual books, real classics, but I have sadly learned they never come back to me. How I would like the *ADTimes* to give us more spiritual writings rather than endless pictures of events.

When we do not have readings as resources we can count on our being able to experience spiritual growth by our traditional customs, such as saying the Rosary. You know, I am sure, that we are to meditate on the mystery of Christ's redeeming life as we say our word

of prayer to Mary. In any case, we all need many graces and we as Catholics have a great friend in our Blessed Mother. We must pray that all Christians come to understand her role in salvation history. [I am writing this on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.] I am sure she finds many ways to intercede for even those who as yet do not really know her. Recently I saw a program on the shrine in India where many non-Christians came to pray to the Mother. I also think here of many Moslems who have some devotion to Mary in places such as Ephesus.

Lent also welcomes us to fast and abstain as well as to do charitable works. I shall not renew my thoughts about fasting and abstaining, other than to say it is good to abstain from things that really mean sacrifice for us. I also recall that good spiritual guides remind us to find small and ordinary things from which to abstain.

Let me now share with you some of Pope Francis' Lenten message as reported in the National Catholic Register.

"The 'globalization of indifference' was at the heart of Pope Francis' Lenten message in which he urged the faithful to fight individualism with merciful hearts that are more attentive of others. Jesus is 'interested in each of us; his love does not allow him to be indifferent to what happens to us.' Often when we live a comfortable lifestyle, 'we forget about others.' 'We are unconcerned with their problems, their sufferings and the injustices they endure.... Our heart grows cold. Lent, he said, is a time of grace, in which we encounter the love of the Lord, who first served us through his life and the washing of the disciples' feet before his passion and death on the cross. 'God is not indifferent to our world; he so loves it that he have his Son for our salvation. The love of God breaks through the barriers of indifference we frequently put up.

'But we can only bear witness to what we ourselves have experienced,' he said. During Mass, 'we become what we receive: the body of Christ. In this body, there is no room for the indifference that so often seems to possess our hearts.' The Pope then speaks of our parishes and communities as 'ecclesial structures (that) enable us to experience being part of one body that receives and shares what God wishes to give. Do we fail to see Lazarus sitting before our closed doors? [He is speaking of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. Often we hear how we are his hands, his feet, and his heart in our doing good for others.] Pope Francis then mentions that we must be 'islands of mercy in the midst of a sea of indifference.'

'Flooded with news reports and troubling images of human suffering, we often feel our complete inability to help.' Praying together and performing small acts of charity are concrete ways that can prevent us from getting 'caught up in this spiral of distress and powerlessness.' After mentioning the times of confession at St. Peter's, he concludes with a prayer that each person receives 'a heart that is firm and merciful, a heart that is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalization of indifference.'

God bless and love you with special graces this Lent!

Monsignor Morrison