

## **In Today's Gospel**

This week, we are continuing to read from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus continues to call us to a higher standard. The Old Testament call for “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” (Ex 21:24) was a call for moderation in justice. The punishment must fit the crime. But Jesus tells us to go one step further. Jesus tells us that rather than an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth, we should turn the other cheek. It is no longer enough for us to simply love those who love us; we must also love our enemies. We must pray for those who persecute us. As difficult as these teachings may be, the last line in today's gospel is perhaps one of the most difficult in Scripture: “Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5:48)

As difficult as it may be to turn the other cheek, to love those who hate us, Jesus calls us to far surpass those standards, the standard Jesus calls us to is that of perfection. I am a long way from perfection. Fortunately, for us, God is perfect, even if we are not. Because of his perfection, God can love us even when we rebel against him. And when we strike out at God, He forgives us. None of us will ever reach perfection, but thanks to a loving God we will always be able to advance in that direction. As long as we reach for the perfection of God, God will reach out to us and bring us into the perfection of heaven.

### **Ash Wednesday**

This Wednesday, we celebrate Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Although it is not a holy day of obligation, it is common practice for Catholics to attend Mass to mark the beginning of this season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We will have several opportunities to attend either Mass or a Scripture service and receive the traditional ashes on the forehead a sign of our rejection of the materialism of the world, and a reminder of our mortality.

At both St. Mary and St. Richard, there will be a Mass at 9:00 AM. There will be an additional Mass at 7:00 PM at St. Mary. In addition, there will be a Scripture service, with the distribution of ashes at 12:30 PM at St. Mary, and 7:00 PM at St. Richard. We will also be celebrating the Stations of the Cross at noon at St. Richard.

At St. Richard, following the 9:00 AM Mass and the noon Stations, there will be homemade soup available in the Social Hall for a “free will” donation. The money raised by your donations goes to support the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

### **Spiritual Exercise**

As we begin Lent, many of us decide what we are going to “give up” for Lent. The practice of fasting is an important spiritual practice. By denying ourselves some good thing, we strengthen ourselves against the temptations of the flesh. In doing this, we are exercising our “spiritual” muscles. Just as a weightlifter who works on his upper body strength improves his overall health, so too do we improve our overall spiritual health by this exercise of fasting. But we must not only exercise one area. The weightlifter also spends time exercising the muscle in other parts of the body as well. We must take on other spiritual exercises to help us build up our spiritual strength in other areas as well.

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The world teaches us that we must have more. It does not matter what it is, but if it's new and expensive, the world tells us we must have it. This is the temptation of the world. In the spiritual exercise of almsgiving, we are seeking not to acquire worldly wealth but giving it away. We are rejecting the temptation of the world. We recognize that what we have is a gift from God and that we should use the gifts that God gives us for the good of others. This practice can be tied to the practice of fasting. If you give up Starbucks coffee in the morning, rather than just pocketing the money, consider donating it to charity.

The temptation of the flesh and the temptation of the world are just two of the sources of temptation that afflict us. The third source is the temptation of the devil. The devil can tempt us, but he cannot force us to do anything. When we are confronted with temptations from the devil, with all temptations in fact, we must renounce it. We must make it clear that we are not going to give in to temptation. We do this through prayer and it takes effort. Prayer is the strongest exercise against all forms of temptation, but especially the temptation of the devil. One way that we can all participate in prayer is by participating in our prayer initiative, "Pray 7:07." Every day, at 7:07 PM, we join together to pray one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory Be. Whether we are alone or in a group, we offer our prayers together.

### **St. Mary Floor Restoration**

I recently submitted the architectural plans for the floor restoration at St. Mary to the College of Consultants. This is a group of priests and laymen who advise the Archbishop on projects in the Archdiocese. After reviewing the plans, we have been approved to move onto the next step, getting bids for the project.

The floor covering will be a mixture of tile and carpet. In addition to the floor covering, we will be reinforcing the center aisle of the church to bear the weight of the tile that we will be modifying at the altar to make it more accessible. Throughout the project, we have worked with some of our parishioners who have experience in the building trades. If you are interested in submitting a bid for all, or part of the project, please contact our business administrator, Albert Damitio.