

THE RECTOR'S CHRONICLE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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Dear Parishioners and Friends,

There are people who actually like Lent. And while others dread the fasting, those who like Lent do have a point. Lent helps us to be a bit more serious about our Christian life. The disciplines which we take on intrude to some extent into our "normal" lives. This means that we are made more conscious of the fact that we are Christians – which is good! The love which we as Christians receive from our Savior ought to be the dominant fact of our existence. It should be in mind night and day. And yet, we so often give all our attention to the things of this world, and forget that we bear the name of Christ, and are loved so profoundly by Him. This is one reason we need a good, solid Lenten discipline. Those who like Lent recognize the benefits of an intrusive discipline – they like being brought closer to Christ. Who can blame them?

At the same time, most of us would agree that fasting is not pleasant. For what it's worth, I approach the Lenten fast with reluctance. For one thing, as soon as the fast begins, and I cannot snack whenever the urge strikes, it seems that the urge strikes much more often and with greater force. I can see that this is the fallen and disordered flesh, but that does not make it any easier to take. Even worse than the fast itself is the increased activity of the tempter: his response to our increased Christian discipline. Having experienced this in past Lents, we fear its recurrence this year. Of course, Jesus has been through this on our behalf. He embraced our fallen flesh, and fasted forty days, hard as that is for us to imagine. His fasting led to His temptations in the wilderness (of which we hear on the First Sunday in Lent). This means that He knows what it is like, and our struggles with fasting and its related temptations can draw us closer to Him. If (more likely when) we struggle with the fast, we can throw ourselves into His arms, grateful for a Lord who was in every way tempted as we are, yet without sin.

This is the point of the Lenten discipline: to draw nearer to our Lord and Savior. Our weakness in discipline teaches us our need for Him, which is greater than we usually imagine. Our failures teach us our weakness and His love for us. Our successes teach us His strength made perfect in our weakness. Since He in His earthly life shared in fasting and temptations, and ultimately in human suffering and death, our comparatively little trials help us to grasp His love for us, which was willing to suffer for us. No cross, no crown.

So I hope we will approach the Lenten disciplines this year with some anticipation (of a closer time with our Lord), even if there is also the usual resistance (to the unpleasantness of fasting and discipline and the likelihood of greater temptation). The fast, which covers the forty weekdays of Lent (Sundays are not included), should be undertaken by all whose health, age and labor permit. It normally involves eating less. There are various ways this can be accomplished: one possibility is to eliminate snacks, seconds, desserts and alcohol. Another is to eat two "half-meals" and one normal meal each day (also eliminating sweets). If for health reasons, it is imprudent to eat less, then one could give up certain favorite foods during Lent. Some discipline of diet is important in order to bring the flesh into subjection to the spirit. After all Jesus teaches, "When ye shall fast ..." not "If ye shall fast."

Other Lenten disciplines build upon the fasting, and can be very fruitful for Christian life. Possibilities (a fuller list is available in the Chapel porch) include the Friday Lenten devotions (details below), adding a Weekday Mass, spiritual reading, daily prayer or quiet, Christian service, etc. One should not, of course, take on too much and become overwhelmed: the incremental approach is better, adding a little to what is already established in one's Christian life. Most of us, however, are inclined to take on too little for the love of Christ than too much. In any case, Lenten discipline is about the love of Christ: about Him more than about us.

Lent at St Michael's

Ash Wednesday is early this year: February 17th. There will be a Mass at the rectory Oratory at 10 a.m., and a Sung Mass at West Laurel Hill at 6:30 p.m. Ashes will be blessed and imposed at both Masses. Like Good Friday, Ash Wednesday is a day of strict fast, when we should fast until 3 p.m. if possible (medications sometimes interfere with this). The ashes for Ash Wednesday are made from last year's palms. So please bring back your palms no later than Quinquagesima (February 14th).

As we did last year, the Friday Lenten devotions will be split between Stations of the Cross at All Saints (Wynnewood), and a time of quiet before the Blessed Sacrament with Benediction at the rectory Oratory. All the services are at 7:30 p.m. Stations will be on February 26th, March 12th and 26th. Benediction will be on March 5th and 19th. There will be a short address each Friday. While it often takes a special effort to attend these services, it is worth the effort – as those who have come will attest.

There will be a Lenten Quiet Day on March 6th at All Saints. The Quiet Day follows the usual format: Mass at 9:30 with a light breakfast (and talking) following. Silence begins with the first address, and continues until we conclude at 2. Please bring lunch. If you need directions or details or transportation, please ask.

Chapel of Peace

West Laurel Hill Cemetery is planning some work at the Chapel of Peace in the near future. Most of the work involves the crematory section of the building, and will not directly affect us. In connection with that work, they will be adding another bathroom, off the hallway opposite the cloister side of the chapel. They are also planning to refinish the floors throughout the building. It is possible that at some point the chapel will not be available to us on a Sunday, in which case we would have services in the Bringhurst Funeral Home chapel just down the hill. As the schedule for the work is firmed up, I will let you know more. The Cemetery has been very good to us since we left St James, and continues to make every accommodation for us. I am grateful!

Also coming soon (I hope): the frame for Chris Jordan's altarpiece. This has been in the works for a very long time – the firm which was supposed to make it kept putting off the completion date, to the point where we finally had to cancel the contract and find another source. The frame includes two side “wings,” which will incorporate smaller panels with scenes from the life of Christ. Chris has painted a number of these, providing difference sets for the Church's seasons. My hope is that the frame can be finished and in place before Easter.

Missions

In 2009, St Michael's gave financial support to a number of worthy causes outside the parish. We give 10% of our pledge and plate income to the Diocese, which primarily supports the Bishop (the Diocesan budget is about the same size as our parish budget: like ours, theirs is a lean operation). In addition, we support foreign missions through the International Anglican Fellowship. This year, our money went to support Bishop Rodriguez, the TAC Bishop in Puerto Rico. As in past years, we also supported the Whosoever Gospel Mission in Germantown, which helps homeless men and addicts; Harvest Ministries, which works with people struggling with sexual addictions; Mercy Vocational High School, on Hunting Park Avenue near St James, which does fine work with mostly at-risk youth; and Christ Academy, a classical Christian school in Collingdale, where two of our boys attend. If you're curious about any of these, please ask. More information is available. They are all organizations which do good work and where our limited funds are wisely used. Back in the days when we did not have a diocese to support, we could give more to such missions. Now, I am glad we have continued funding, even if scaled back somewhat.

I'm sure you have been praying for the poor folk in Haiti, suffering the devastation from the earthquake. While many have already contributed to their relief through one agency or another, we wanted to give you the opportunity to contribute through the International Anglican Fellowship. These funds will go entirely to the relief of the needs, with nothing taken out for overhead. Envelopes are available in the porch on Sundays. Checks should be made out to St Michael's, and marked “Haiti relief.” Thanks!

Coming Events

We will be starting another weeknight School of Religion series, at which we will read through the Catechism of the Catholic Church together. This is in many ways a wonderful book, articulating Christian faith and practice (from the Roman Catholic perspective) for the current age. We'll set the night (most likely Tuesday or Wednesday) for the convenience of those interested, so please let me know if you would like to be a part of it.

Another *youth night* at the rectory is coming up on February 27th, following up on the stressful one last month. We begin with supper at 6, followed by a program of great interest and excitement. The topic is, once again, so exciting that I dare not reveal it here. We'll conclude (with prayer) by 8:30, so everyone can get home in good time for a good night's sleep before Sunday. We hope all the parish youth will attend.

The Annual Meeting of the congregation and vestry election is coming up next Sunday, Sexagesima, February 7th, at 11:30 at the Chapel of Peace at West Laurel Hill Cemetery. I hope all parishioners will make it a point to be there.

I would also invite you to join in a Pan-Anglican Day of Fasting and Prayer on February 26th (Ember Friday in Lent). This is a grass-roots effort to seek God's mercy for the mess that Anglicanism is in the United States and elsewhere. Obviously it is sorely divided, and many Anglicans have strayed from the fulness of our heritage. Even those who have not have not always done all they could in humility and courage to prevent damage to the Church. Clearly there is no political or worldly solution to our woes. In seeking a spiritual solution, we must humble ourselves before God, acknowledge that we have made a mess of it, and beg Him to use us to help repair the damage.

Kudos

Thanks goes this month to:

- my mother for doing the last *Chronicle* mailing.
- Bishop Campese, for venturing north in January to confirm for us.

Faithfully,

