SEASON OF LENT

St Bonaventure stated, "Three things are necessary to everyone: truth that brings understanding, love of Christ which brings compassion, and endurance of hope which brings perseverance." This Lent, I hope to bring our parish family more understanding, compassion, and faithfulness through developing a habit of hope.

Each year the Lord Jesus calls the entire Church to a special season of penance and renewal. As we begin this holy time of Lent, we should reflect on our need for conversion of heart, prayer, charitable works and penance.

The season of Lent extends this year from Ash Wednesday, February 14, to the Mass of the Lord's Supper, March 29, inclusive.

1. Everyone 14 years of age or over is bound to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all Fridays of Lent.
2. Everyone 18 years of age and under 59 years of age is also bound to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
3. On these two days of fast and abstinence, only one full meatless meal is allowed. The other meatless meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to one's needs, but altogether they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted on these two days, but liquids, including milk and fruit juices are allowed. When health or ability to work would be seriously affected, the obligation of the law is modified. Because Lent is a special season for all Christians, we should not lightly excuse ourselves from these penitential practices.
4. To completely disregard the law of fast and abstinence is seriously sinful.

ASH WEDNESDAY IS ALSO VALENTINE'S DAY AND OTHER REASONS TO SKIP FASTING AND ABSTANING FROM MEAT DURING LENT

From the Archdiocese of Chicago: "Catholics throughout the world recognize Ash Wednesday as the solemn beginning of a period of prayerful reflection and penance, as is evident by the large number of church goers on this day," the statement reads.

"In view of the significance of Ash Wednesday the obligation of fast and abstinence must naturally be the priority in the Catholic community," it continues. "Valentine's Day can appropriately be celebrated the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday which also happens to be Mardi Gras, a traditionally festive time before beginning our Lenten observance."

LENTEN DISCIPLINES: FASTING AND ALMSGIVING

For these Forty Days we are conscious of how we must sharpen our senses and focus mind and heart on the Reign of God. We are, above all, aware of those waters in which we were baptized into Christ's death. We died to sin and evil and began a new life in Christ. The waters of Baptism wait at Lent's end for the catechumens, but we are called to renew our Baptism as well.

The Church asks us to give ourselves to prayer and to the reading of Scripture, to fasting and to giving alms. The fasting that all do together on Fridays is but a sign of the daily Lenten discipline of individuals and households: fasting for certain periods of time, fasting from certain foods, but also fasting from other things and activities. Likewise, the giving of alms is some effort to share this world equally – not only through the distribution of money, but through the sharing of our time and talents. – Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007

ASH WEDNESDAY: FEBRUARY 14, 2018

8:00 AM Mass and Distribution of Ashes at St. Joseph-Olney
5:30 PM Mass and Distribution of Ashes at St. Joseph-Stringtown'
6:30 PM Prayer and Distribution of Ashes at St. Joseph-Olney (Lead by Caroline Trimble)
7:00 PM Mass and Distribution of Ashes at Holy Cross-Wendelin

STATIONS OF THE CROSS---
Wednesday February 21 & 28, March 7, 14, & 21 at 7:00PM at Holy Cross-Wendelin
Friday, February 23, March 2, 9, 16, & 23 at 2:15pm at St. Joseph-Olney
Friday, February 16 & 23, March 2, 9, 16 & 23 at 6:30pm at St. Joseph-Stringtown

RECONCILIATION
Monday, February 26, at 5:30pm at St. Joseph-Stringtown
Wednesday February 7 & 28, March 7 & 14 at 6:30pm at Holy Cross-Wendelin
Wednesday, February 21 at 6:30pm at St. Joseph-Stringtown
Wednesday, March 21, at 6:30pm at St. Joseph-Olney
Friday, February 23, March 2, 9, 16 & 23 at 2:00pm at St. Joseph-Olney
Friday, February 16, March 2, 9 & 23 at 6:30pm at St. Joseph-Stringtown
Saturdays at 3:30-4:00pm at St. Joseph-Olney

THE PRACTICES AND DISCIPLINES OF THE LENTEN SEASON

Today's practices come from the historical model from the early church. New believers were mentored in the Christian faith weeks before Easter, preparing for their baptisms at the Great Easter Vigil. The idea of giving something up for Lent came out of this tradition, when fasting—abstaining from food as an act of discipline in solidarity with others in the community—was used to raise one's spiritual consciousness and empty oneself before God. Prayer which can be a good way to explore a deeper expression of faith. Alms-giving in which we take on more Christ-like attitude toward others, a humble spirit at work, or a feeling of gratitude in the midst of scarcity. And Reconciliation with our God in order to walk with him instead of hiding from him.

Our sessions will begin at 5:30pm and last until 6:30-7:00pm at St. Joseph-Olney
Tuesday, February 20: Hope in the Confession of Sins and Reconciliation with God.
Tuesday, February 27: Hope in Prayer and Conversation with God
Tuesday, March 6: Hope in Fasting by understanding our reliance on God
Tuesday, March 13: Hope in Almsgiving by sharing with others all that we receive from God
Tuesday, March 20: Hope in celebrating the Great Triduum of Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection.

PREPARING BEFORE LENT BEGINS

Taking some time to get ready for Lent will ensure that we aren't going to miss the first week or two of Lent, because we are just getting started. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, but we want to be ready to really take off on that day, rather than just beginning to think about Lent on that day. Part of what makes a vacation or a special anniversary so special is the build-up to it.

Before we get to Ash Wednesday, we should start asking ourselves some questions and we should start with some preparations. "What does God want to give me this year?" This question may require that I slow down a bit and listen to my inner spirit. For example, even if I'm very busy, I realize I'm hungry when I hear my stomach start "growling." "What am I going to be doing on Ash Wednesday?" Too often, Ash Wednesday is like every other day, except that I manage to get to church and get ashes on my forehead. Is there anything else I can do on Ash Wednesday? How will fasting and abstaining happen for me, for my family on that special day?

It doesn't a lot of time to prepare for the beginning of Lent. It just takes desire and focus. God can do so much with that. We can give God more of a space to touch our hearts if we begin to establish some simple patterns. We could wake up each morning, and for something like a half a minute to a minute, stand by the edge of our beds, and just ask the Lord for the grace to let this day be one in which I long for the beginning of Lent. Perhaps we need to ask for specific helps or graces to get ready to begin Lent. Whatever we try to say, our Lord can understand the Spirit trying to speak through our simple words. And all it takes is the time to find and put on our slippers. And each night, in the days ahead, we can practice giving thanks to God before I go to bed. This simple pattern, in the morning and evening can stir our spirits to look forward to and prepare for Lent, as a season of grace.

May our Lord bless us all on this journey ahead.