

From the PA's Desk

RCIA:

Next Saturday on the Vigil of the First Sunday of Lent, Aaron, Sydney, and Natalie Lloyd, will attend the **Rite of Election** and the **Call to Continuing Conversion** at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish Church in Midland. Bishop Cistone will call them and all those preparing for Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion to the Easter Sacraments at the next Easter Vigil. Although Alan Larson and Terry Catrell (who are already baptized Christians) and have been in Florida since after Christmas, they also will be initiated at the Easter Vigil, and will return home soon. Aaron and his two daughters, Sydney and Natalie, along with the girls mom, Brianna, have been making our parish community their spiritual home, and we are blessed to have them in our church. Last week Aaron was spotted out in our parking lot after Mass changing a parishioner's tire, and after seeing that example of "Jesus at work among us," I told him he passed the final test before his initiation. Both Fr. Fred and I saw what he did, and we both said the same thing: "I don't know how to change a tire." As you see them around church, congratulate them on choosing to make Catholicism, and us, their home.

Alpha: Alpha begins in another week, and we have over 100 registered to attend. We start right at 6 pm, but if you get there a little early, grab a name tag and sign up for a small group lead by myself or one of our Evangelization Team members. We have been meeting at least once a month (twice in the past two weeks) learning how to be good facilitators, and we are excited as we already feel the power of God's Spirit present and working in our faith community.

LENT BEGINS: Lent is a time for us to "go on retreat" without having to travel miles away. All of us are given the chance to look at our lives and into our relationship with God, and examine how we can make it better. **On ASH WEDNESDAY, we will have a Mass at 9:00 am with the Distribution of Ashes in Shepherd, and a Word & Communion Service with Distribution of Ashes in Irishtown at 6 pm.**

Fasting and Abstinence:

FASTING is to be observed by all 18 years of age and older who have not yet celebrated their 59th birthday. On a fast day one full meal is allowed. Two other meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one's needs, but together they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted, but liquids, including milk and juices, are allowed. **Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017 and Good Friday, April 14, 2017 are days of fast and abstinence.**

ABSTINENCE is observed by all 14 years of age and older. On days of abstinence no meat is allowed. Note that when health or ability to work would be seriously affected, the law does not oblige. When in doubt concerning fast and abstinence, the pastor or pastoral administrator should be consulted. **All the Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence.**

Fasting, almsgiving, and prayer are the three traditional disciplines of Lent. The faithful, the Elect and those Candidates preparing for Reception into Full Communion in the Catholic Church should undertake these practices seriously in a spirit of penance and of preparation for baptism or of renewal of baptism at Easter.

Lent 2017:

Last Advent Fr. Fred challenged us to be people of Joy as we celebrated the presence of Christ among us. I think the theme of joyful parishioners is a key in inviting others into our vibrant community of faith. Pope Francis recently made a comment about how some Catholics have “sour-lemon faces,” and how nobody would be attracted to the church if they repeatedly noticed that look on our faces. In fact, Francis’s first Apostolic Exhortation to the Church was titled ***The Joy of the Gospel***. Within it, Pope Francis beautifully talks about the need to be joyful and enthusiastic in how we live out our discipleship. In keeping with that theme started last Advent, I’ve ordered for all parishioners, Matthew Kelly’s new book ***Resisting Happiness***. Matthew Kelly offers a deeply personal approach to how we can live as happy and inspired disciples of Jesus, and how this approach to living is contagious for all we meet. It was specifically written to re-engage disengaged Catholics and inspire them to grow in their spiritual lives. Beginning next weekend, this book will be available at the back of church for free. The only cost involved for you is to spread the joy and enthusiasm of our Catholic faith to others. It all begins with a smile to everyone we meet.

Best Lent Ever: Don’t Give Up Chocolate For Lent This Year

In addition, for a great online Lenten Resource offering short daily readings and resources, visit **DynamicCatholic.com/BestLentEver** Best Lent ever is a free, daily email program that will help you have a truly life-changing Lent. This year’s program is based on the book, *Resisting Happiness*. After you sign-up online, you will start receiving emails beginning on Ash Wednesday, and you will discover how we can open our hearts to God and do more than just give up chocolate for Lent. See the posters at the back of church for more information.

Three Minute Teachings before Mass: Beginning next weekend for three minutes before Mass starts, I’ll do a little catechetical session for four weekends on the beauty and value of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance/Confession).

Sacrament of Reconciliation:

This year we are joining with Nativity of the Lord Parish at their Mount St. Joseph Church in St. Louis to celebrate a communal reconciliation with individual confession and absolution on **Thursday March 23 at 6:30 PM. We will begin with a meal at 5:30 PM for all those interested, and there will be a short presentation on the catechesis of confession/penance.**

Fr. Fred will hear private Confessions on Thursday March 30, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm.