

From the Deacon's Desk

### **Alpha begins Monday:**

Alpha is an opportunity to explore the meaning of life and the Christian faith in a friendly, open and informal environment. Alpha has eleven sessions and includes food, a short DVD talk and a discussion at the end where you can—but don't have to—share your thoughts. Alpha is for everyone, young and old, believer and non-believer alike.

**Alpha will meet weekly on Monday evenings beginning February 19, 2017 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM in the hall. The course is free although registration is required. Please sign up in the back of church in the gathering area.**

### **Alpha for Youth:**

**This year we will also offer an Alpha Youth discussion group for kids between the ages of 11 to late teens. They will join the adults for the community meal and then break off into their own DVD presentation and faith discussion group.**

### **Gospel Today: Temptations**

The Gospel story for today talks about Jesus' temptations in the desert. What has always struck me about the temptation story is that it tells us that the "Spirit" led him into that experience. Isn't the Spirit supposed to shield us from those desert events, or perhaps they are a part of the human experience, and the Spirit helps us work through them? In other words, the temptations that Jesus experienced are actually temptations that all of us believers experience as being alive on this earth.

Jesus has this experience right after he realizes he is the "Beloved of God." Soon after that awareness he encounters moments and experiences, just as we all have, that challenge that insight. We are repeatedly told over and over again that God loves us more than we can imagine, and like Jesus, that makes us the Beloved Ones of God. But like Jesus too, we experience moments of hunger, danger, and lack of power, and we begin to question if God really loves and cares for us like we thought.

The first temptation is about the basic need to be fed and to be full or satisfied. What are the things we hunger for in life? Are we starving for physical food, or do we also starve for love, compassion, understanding, acceptance, and the list is endless. And when we find ourselves hungry for something, whatever it may be, do we question God's love for us?

How about the temptation for safety (the second temptation), and shouldn't "God's Beloved" always be safe from harm? And when we like Jesus experience moments when we are in danger or crisis, and we are not safe from others or the world, do we begin to question, like Jesus' temptations, if we too are "God's Beloved?"

How about the temptation to have unlimited power (third temptation) to do whatever we want in life; to control people, places, circumstances, events, and outcomes. And when we face those moments of powerlessness, do we question if God really cares and loves us as his "Beloved?"

Jesus' temptations are our temptations, and perhaps the more we struggle with the reality of God loving us despite our hungers, dangers, and powerlessness, the more we will come to know as Jesus did, that yes, we really are the Beloved of God.

### **Regulations for Fast and Abstinence:**

As a reminder of what we Catholics practice, Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2018 and Good Friday, March 30, 2018, are days of fast and abstinence. All Fridays of Lent are days of 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 (unless one has medical or health issues requiring it), but liquids, including milk and juices, are allowed.

† **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.

Many world religions practice fasting, not because God delights in hunger or suffering, but the very act of fasting causes us to enter into solidarity with those throughout the world who are hungry, and fasting also helps us turn our attention on why we fast; namely, to be more aware and conscious of God's presence in our lives.

### **Prayers for Bishop Cistone:**

Throughout the diocese we have begun to pray for Bishop Cistone who began his round of weekly chemo and radiation for lung cancer last Wednesday. His treatment will continue through the Lenten Season and we all pray for his healing and peace. I invite you all to join me in daily prayers for our chief shepherd, and you will find a prayer in today's bulletin to aid you in prayer. Perhaps you might want to send him a card for healing and support.

### **Homemade Crosses Needed For Lent:**

The Art & Environment Committee is inviting every parishioner, older and younger, to make a small cross out of any material, no bigger than six or ten inches, that will be used with our Lenten decorations. Be creative and use your imaginations.

Thank you to Valerie H., Diane C., Joyce N., and the Catrell family for helping decorate our church for Lent, and for all of them for being creative as we try to involve every child and adult in our presentations.

### **The Traveling Last Supper Troupe:**

**We will be hosting a live-drama presentation of the Last Supper by a community theater group on Saturday March 24 at 7 pm in St. Vincent church.**

The Traveling Last Supper Troupe is an ecumenical group made up of a cast of 18 people, a narrator and a musical duo. The group has been performing since 2006, with 6 of the original members still in the cast. They are mostly Catholics from Hemlock, Merrill, Saginaw, Midland and the Auburn areas.

The Last Supper presentation starts with Jesus informing the Apostles that He will be betrayed. In their horror they examine themselves to see if they might be that person.

**Admission is free but they do ask for an offering at the exits if you are able to contribute. The money they collect will go to area soup kitchens and food pantries, and they will keep a small amount for themselves for publicity materials and costume upkeep.**