

From the Deacon's Desk

RCIA Scrutinies:

At this time during Lent we celebrate the liturgical rite called THE SCRUTINIES with our catechumens and candidates as they continue their journey toward Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and full acceptance into the Catholic Church. The Scrutinies are the primary rites of the Lenten period of purification and enlightenment. They are rites for self-searching and repentance.

To "scrutinize" means to take a long and careful look at all the ways we need to be healed and strengthened. The Scrutiny rites allow the elect to "go public" with their struggles in faith which the congregation accepts as their own. If the rites are celebrated as the Church intends, they give the elect a strong sense that the community is saying to them, it's okay to still have areas in your life which are contrary to the Gospel -- as long as you are sincerely trying to do something about them, because that's all we ourselves, the baptized, are ever able to do. We're not saints, but the important thing is to honestly face up to whatever hinders us from living fully Christian lives and to pray together for freedom from these burdens.

In the Scrutinies, the elect and the community acknowledge the power of evil that hinders them from following Christ, and the elect give public witness to their on-going conversion. Conversion is not about punishment for sin, it is about an all-loving merciful God who offers to save us from sin. Conversion is an opportunity to grow and change.

The faithful of St. Vincent de Paul Parish are an important part of initiation in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The PARISH COMMUNITY is primarily responsible for the formation and conversion of our RCIA catechumens and candidates. The people of God, as represented by the parish, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults (and children) is the responsibility of all the baptized. We continue to pray for all catechumens and candidates and especially for Scott and Kristen as they continue their remarkable journey of faith. May God bless them (and us) in this journey of faith.

Lent is Half Over:

I found a reflection from a priest named Fr. Mark Inglot on fasting and feasting, and although Lent is more than half over, it's not too late to reevaluate our Lenten practices and attitudes.

A Lenten Prayer: How to Fast and Feast...

"Fast from judging others; feast on the Christ dwelling within them. Fast from emphasis on differences; feast on the unity of all life. Fast from words that pollute; feast on phrases that purify. Fast from discontent; feast on gratitude. Fast from anger; feast on patience. Fast from pessimism; feast on optimism.

Fast from worry; feast on trust. Fast from complaining; feast on appreciation. Fast from hostility; feast on nonviolence. Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness. Fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others.

Fast from discouragement; feast on hope. Fast from facts that depress; feast on truths that uplift. Fast from thoughts that weaken; feast on promises that inspire. Fast from idle gossip; feast on purposeful silence.

Gentle God, during this season of fasting and feasting, gift us with Your Presence, so we can be a gift to others in carrying out your work. Amen."

4th Sunday of Lent:

On the 4th Sunday of Lent the Church celebrates what is known as Laetare or “Rejoice” Sunday. Some parishes, to assist in the joyful nature of this week, will include flowers around the altar and some priests will choose to wear rose-colored vestments. The Church has a moment of rejoicing in the midst of Lent as we get ready to celebrate the liturgies of Holy Week.

Holy Week is the holiest of time in the Catholic Church and we “pull out” all the “bells and whistles” so-to-speak. Starting with Palm Sunday and then the Chrism Mass at the Cathedral, followed a few days later by the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, where the Washing of the Feet takes place and the Eucharistic Procession occurs to the place where the Blessed Sacrament will be reserved for adoration that evening. This week is unlike any other.

On Good Friday (the only day throughout the year when a Mass is not celebrated), we listen to the reading of the Passion, followed by the Adoration and Veneration of the Cross and then Holy Communion. As the Cross is carried through our midst and slowly revealed, we enter into the passion and death of Jesus more and more.

The Easter Vigil is like no other liturgy and we gather outside around a blazing fire at night as the light of Christ is returned into our lives through his resurrection. We bless the new Easter fire and bless the new Christ Candle which will be used at every baptism and every funeral throughout the year. We enter the dark church and as the light is shared by all (through individually held candles), the entire church brightens with His light. We listen to the stories of salvation history, and the significance of water is seen in the baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist of the catechumens, and the renewal of Baptismal promises for the rest of us.

The three day liturgy (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday) is called the Triduum (meaning three) and it is really designed as one long liturgical action with brief (day-long) intermissions between the three days. It is the holiest time for us Catholics and an event worth making time for. We Catholics are known for doing liturgical actions well, and nowhere does this happen better than in the events of Holy Week.

Alpha Next Week: How can I have faith?

Talk summary:

- The episode addresses the questions, ‘What is a Christian?’ and ‘How do I know if I’m a Christian?’
- When a person becomes a Christian, they begin a new life – Christianity is about a relationship with Jesus and when you are in a relationship with someone – you know it.
- You can know that you are a Christian.
- Faith is trust – everybody exercises faith. But faith in Jesus is not a blind leap, but a step based on evidence.
- Christian faith is based on three things:
 - God’s promise – the word of God
 - The work of Jesus
 - The witness of the Holy Spirit
- The episode finishes with an encouragement to take that step of faith (it’s a free gift but it cost Jesus his life for us), based on the evidence, and an opportunity to pray, inviting Jesus into our hearts: ‘I will come in and eat with that person and they with me.’ (Revelation 3:20)

Security Issues:

Last Tuesday we were given an overview of the safety procedures workshop that Aaron Lloyd attended a few weeks ago. The Pastoral Council and Aaron, through a sub-committee, is in the process of coming up with a plan of action for everything from bomb threats to fires to tornados to other medical emergencies like heart attacks or situations with dangerous persons. Aaron did mention that they advised all parishes to promote a S.E.A. plan of action. S.E.A. means Seek (shelter), Escape (if possible), and Attack (if one is able to subdue a dangerous individual). In next few months the Shepherd Police Chief will also help us create a plan of action.