

First Sunday of Lent, February 18: Lent is activity-oriented.

Sunday Gospel Mark: 1: 12-15.

“At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. Jesus Announces the Good News. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Repent and believe in the Good News of God’s Kingdom: Mark’s gospel here gives us the first public words of Jesus, his Messianic mission’s basic keynote speech, which has four specific messages: 1) “This is about time.” 2) The reign of God is right here.” 3) “Repent – make the change now.” 4) Believe in the Gospel.” This speech summarizes the entire purpose of Jesus’ ministry. In this statement, Jesus is not asking his audience to do or not to do something **to shape their future in Heaven**. He is **concerned with the here and now**. The reign of God in the person of Christ, the Son of God is here. The season of Lent requires us to PRAY, FAST, and GIVE ARMS. Lent is activity-oriented. Following our Catholic traditions, let us set out more time for the following.

1. Visits to Blessed Sacrament.
2. Daily meditation /reflection.
3. Set aside time for Private Prayers – Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet.
4. Confession /reconciliation.
5. Commit time to your Small Faith Group.
6. Daily/Weekly reception of the Holy Communion.
7. Fast: cut back to assist your spiritual strength: food, and drinks. Maybe cut back on social media and screen time.
8. Fasting: set aside some money you might spend on yourself for meals, entertainment, or clothes and give that to an organization that takes care of the less fortunate in our society - Family Promise, lunch for hungry kids, including those kids in Africa.
9. **Stations of the Cross every Friday @ 6:00PM** and join in the fellowship meal.

During LENT, the Catholic church asks us to pray, to fast, and to give arms. The holy season of Lent is activity-oriented, with a focus on spiritual renewal and getting closer to God. In the course of the year, we focus so much on our job, our health, our family, kids, sports, how am I doing with this or that, am I impressing this person or that person, and these are all alright. Lent focuses on actions that will help to raise our minds and hearts to God, acts that will ***help us tune in to our friendship or personal relationship with Christ***. Lent is our basic reminder that Christ died on the cross for me!

To give arms is a great act of love. To love means to will the good of the other, this is action, and not simple emotional fireworks. To give arms means to show love, to help the poor, and to support the poor and the needy, setting aside some money we might spend on ourselves for meals, entertainment, or clothes and giving it to an organization that takes care of the less fortunate in our society.

Family Promise of Yellowstone Valley works to help homeless families in the Yellowstone Valley area achieve and sustain independence through a community-based response. They believe that every family deserves a safe and secure home, and they work to provide them with the ***resources and support they need to break the cycle of homelessness***. Last week St Pius X parish hosted Family Promise for one week. Shelly Greenfield told me that, hosting the program for the week, takes between 75 to 200 volunteers. Planning, shopping, cooking, serving etc. This is love in action. This is what we are called to do. God bless all our volunteers and dynamic disciples.

The December 2023 edition of the Catholic Ambassador magazine (the ministry of Missionaries of St Paul, to which I belong) among others, is focused on the story and ministry of Rev Noel Ugoagwu, who provided a makeshift home for boys in South Sudan. These kids roamed the streets in their torn clothes, scavenging for food, with no prospects for education or the future.

*Holiness does not mean doing extraordinary things but doing ordinary things with love and faith – Pope Francis.

Stations of the Cross (the fifth Station – Simon helps Jesus to carry the Cross):

Lord Jesus Christ, make me realize that every time I wipe a dish, pick up an object off the floor, assist a child in some small task, or give another preference in traffic or the store; each time I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, teach the ignorant, or lend my hand in any way – my name is Simon. And the kindness I extend to them I give to you. Amen. **Lent is activity-oriented, with a focus on the basics of love. Amen.**

Thank you.

May you have a Spirit-filled Lent.

Fr Martin Ezeihuaku, MSP.