

*Thank you so much* for your kindness on the occasion of the *fifteenth anniversary of my 39<sup>th</sup> birthday!* I am grateful for your thoughtful cards, delicious goodies, generous gifts, and, above all, assurances of prayers. God bless you!

“Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, *‘The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel’*” (Mark 1:15). This proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth at the beginning of His public ministry retains its full rigor and vigor for you and me today! He calls us – indeed, the whole world – to *conversion!* “*Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life*” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1427). Even after Baptism “Christ’s call to conversion continues to resound” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1427) in the lives of all those who call themselves Christians. “This second conversion is an *uninterrupted task* for the whole Church . . . This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the *movement of a ‘contrite heart,’ drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first*” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1427). The *liturgical season of Lent* is that period of 40 days of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving that “are meant to help lead the believer to *ongoing conversion and a deeper faith* in the Lord who redeemed us” (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, 518).

With *Ash Wednesday* we enter into Lent. *Masses with the distribution of ashes are 8:30 AM and 7:00 PM. At 4:00 PM there is a Liturgy of the Word with the distribution of ashes followed by Stations of the Cross* with the young children of our CCD program. Also, be reminded that *during the Mass incense is not used for the entire duration of Lent*. Incense is used, however, during Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

We have the opportunity to do *penance* in union with our Catholic brothers and sisters around the world as we follow the universal Church Lenten discipline regarding *fasting* and *abstinence*. Those who have celebrated their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, all Fridays in Lent, and Good Friday. In addition, those who have celebrated their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, until they celebrate their 59<sup>th</sup> birthday, fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Those who are bound to this regulation may eat only *one full meal. Two smaller meals are permitted if necessary to maintain strength according to one’s needs, but eating solid foods between meals is not permitted*. Please note that the bishops of Wisconsin have granted a *special dispensation statewide from adhering to the law of abstinence for Friday, March 17*. This dispensation allows the faithful to celebrate the Feast of Saint Patrick. Those who utilize the dispensation must perform another act of penance (for example, self-denial, charity, prayer).

In addition to carving out time for prayer at home and as a family, essential to any Lenten spiritual program is regular participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in observance of the *Lord’s Day* (Vigil on Saturday or Sunday itself). As your schedule allows, you might additionally assist at *Mass* celebrated on *weekdays*. Also, consider spending some time *before the Blessed Sacrament which is exposed on the First Fridays (March 3 and April 7) following the 8:30 AM Mass as well as during the Men’s League*

**7:00 PM Holy Hour (March 6 and April 3).** On **Tuesday, March 14**, you have the opportunity to learn about a beautiful, scriptural, and ecclesial way of praying and sanctifying your days. On that day I am offering a **presentation (6:30-8:00 PM) about the Liturgy of the Hours** (also known as the Breviary or Divine Office): its history, spirituality, and simply how to do it! One of the most popular devotions during the Season of Lent is praying the **Stations of the Cross**. The Stations are prayed **Fridays (March 10, 17, 24, 31) at 7:00 PM** which also includes **Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament**. On the **First Fridays (March 3 and April 7)** the Stations are prayed **during Exposition following the 8:30 AM Mass**.

An essential component of your spiritual preparation for Easter includes the **Sacrament of Penance**. Beyond the usual schedule (Saturdays 5:00-5:50 PM and Sundays 8:30-9:20 AM) **opportunities for Confession are greatly expanded during Lent**. Please consult the separate listing. The words of Pope Saint John Paul II I make my own: ***“To those who have been far away from the Sacrament of Reconciliation and forgiving love I make this appeal: come back to this source of grace; do not be afraid! Christ Himself is waiting for you. He will heal you, and you will be at peace with God!”***

Through the parish Stewardship Committee you have an opportunity for **almsgiving** through the ***“Meals from the Heart” (mealsfromtheheart.org) meal packing event at our school on Saturday, March 11, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM***. The goal for the day is to package 30,000 ready-made meals to be distributed to the food pantries in River Falls, Ellsworth, and Prescott. ***Now is the time for you and your family to sign up for a two-hour shift*** by going online to our parish website (**stmarysbigriver.com**) or our Facebook page. Children are welcome! ***Now is also the time for you to donate money to pay the \$7500.00 cost for the food that will be packaged***. Donate online by visiting our parish website or our Facebook page or place a donation made out to “Saint Mary’s Parish” in an envelope marked “Meals from the Heart” and drop it in the collection basket at church.

Finally, with a view to helping you to come to a ***deeper knowledge and love of Jesus Christ***, from my recent pilgrimage to the land made holy by the Lord Himself I am offering in church ***presentations of pictures and stories on three successive Tuesdays (6:30-8:00 PM)***. In the **first** presentation (***Tuesday, March 21***) ***we travel through Galilee, the northern part of Israel wherein Jesus exercised most of His public ministry*** including Nazareth, Cana, the River Jordan, and the Sea of Galilee. In the **second** presentation (***Tuesday, March 28***), we explore the ***southern part of Israel*** including the Bethlehem, the Dead Sea, the Mount of Olives, and Jerusalem. Through the **third** presentation (***Tuesday, April 4***) I prayerfully guide you ***from the Scriptures and the sights of the Holy Land to the Holy Week liturgies*** wherein we celebrate these mysteries of our Redemption. All the presentations are different and so you can come to one or all. Children are welcome. Invite a family member or friend. Indeed, all are welcome!

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us! Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us! Venerable Solanus Casey, pray for us!

*Father Kevin C. Louis, STL*