



CHURCH OF SAINT MARY

510 N. Prospect Ave. • Alma, MI 48801
Office (989)463-5370 • Fax (989)463-1369

MOUNT SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH

605 S. Franklin St. • St. Louis, MI 48880
Office (989)681-5080 • Fax (989)681-2887



Dear Parish Family,

March 20, 2011

Lenten Soup Suppers continue this Wednesday, March 23 at 6:00 pm at St. Mary. This week's talk is on the Structure of the Mass, and will begin at 6:30 pm.

Stations of the Cross continue on Fridays at 7:00 pm at Mt. St. Joseph. Come and walk the road to Calvary with Our Lord in prayer.

LENTEN FAST AND ABSTINENCE GUIDELINES

FASTING is required of those between the ages of 18 and 59 on **Ash Wednesday** and **Good Friday**. On days of fasting, one full meal and two smaller meals are permitted with **NO** eating between meals.

ABSTINENCE is required of all those 14 years and older on **ALL Fridays of Lent**, as well as on **Ash Wednesday** and **Good Friday**. Abstinence means refraining from eating food items made of or from red meat (beef and pork), animal fat, or poultry.

Coming up this Thursday, March 24 at St. Mary Church, Jim and Mary Cowan will be returning for a Lenten evening of prayer and praise. Jim was blessed to have led the music at Steubenville Youth Conferences for 25 years. This will be their third visit to our parishes in the past twelve months. Come and be renewed in spirit!

Saturday April 2 from 4:30 pm - 8:30 pm at Holy Spirit Parish in Shields is a Diocesan Youth Program called Feed the Fire. This includes Mass with Bishop Cistone, a Taco/Nacho Dinner for \$5.00 (please bring money), nationally known motivational speaker Brian Pruitt, Praise and Worship music, and Eucharistic Adoration. The Mass fulfills your Sunday obligation; and it's a great opportunity to visit one of our former pastors, Fr. Dave Parsch!

Tuesday evening daily Mass continues at St. Mary at 8:00 pm followed by Adoration and Compline; ending right around 9:00 pm. This is an excellent opportunity to enhance your prayer life during Lent.

As we move deeper into Lent, please continue to pray for each other and for our parishes. Intercessory prayer is a powerful tool - so please pray! God bless you!

Fr. David

An Explanation of the Lenten Bulletin Covers

For the Holy Season of Lent, our bulletin covers will reflect the subject of the Sunday Gospel in Christian art.

The bulletin cover for the First Sunday of Lent was a painting by the 19th century artist Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi who lived from 1837-1887. He was an intellectual leader of the Russian democratic art movement. Last week's cover was Kramskoi's 1872 work, *Christ in the Desert*, which reflects a humanistic tradition by treating a religious subject in moral-philosophical terms. He imbued this image of Christ with dramatic experiences in a deeply psychological and vital interpretation, evoking the idea of his heroic self-sacrifice. Kramskoi aspired to expand the ideological expressiveness of his images, and created art that existed on the cusp of portraiture and genre-painting. His paintings disclose their subjects' complex and sincere emotions, their personalities and fates. The democratic orientation of Kramskoi's art, his acute critical judgments about it, and his persistent quest for objective public criteria for the evaluation of art exerted an essential influence on the development of democratic art and aesthetics in Russia in the last third of the nineteenth century.

The bulletin cover for this week, the Second Sunday of Lent is the *Transfiguration of Jesus*, authored by Theophanes the Greek who lived from 1340-1410. This piece dates from the year 1408. Theophanes was born in Constantinople and in his 30s moved to Novogorod, and in his late 50s to Moscow. He is described as having been learned in philosophy by his contemporaries. A hint of this might be gathered from this panel icon where the arresting geometry and brilliance of the figure of Christ is balanced against the ordered disarray of the earthbound Apostles, strewn about doll-like in the uncreated Light of Mount Tabor. The balance of mathematical harmony in line and shape, wed to a master's use of an earth-tone palette and precious gold leaf, evokes a spirituality that is immensely powerful, and speaks to the genius of this relatively unknown painter.

THE MEANING OF LENT

The key to understanding the meaning of Lent is simple: Baptism. Preparation for Baptism and for renewing baptismal commitment lies at the heart of the season. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has reemphasized the baptismal character of Lent, especially through the restoration of the Catechumenate and its Lenten rituals. Our challenge today is to renew our understanding of this important season of the Church year and to see how we can integrate our personal practices into this renewed perspective.

Why is Baptism so important in our Lenten understanding? Lent as a 40-day season developed in the fourth century from three merging sources. The first was the ancient paschal fast that began as a two-day observance before Easter but was gradually lengthened to 40 days. The second was the catechumenate as a process of preparation for Baptism, including an intense period of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation to be celebrated at Easter. The third was the Order of Penitents, which was modeled on the catechumenate and sought a second conversion for those who had fallen back into serious sin after Baptism. As the catechumens (candidates for Baptism) entered their final period of preparation for Baptism, the penitents and the rest of the community accompanied them on their journey and prepared to renew their baptismal vows at Easter.

Lent, then, is radically baptismal.

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving

The three traditional pillars of Lenten observance are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The key to renewed appropriation of these practices is to see their link to baptismal renewal.

Prayer: More time given to prayer during Lent should draw us closer to the Lord. We might pray especially for the grace to live out our baptismal promises more fully. We might pray for the elect who will be baptized at Easter and support their conversion journey by our prayer. We might pray for all those who will celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation with us during Lent that they will be truly renewed in their baptismal commitment.

Fasting: Fasting is one of the most ancient practices linked to Lent. In fact, the paschal fast predates Lent as we know it. The early Church fasted intensely for two days before the celebration of the Easter Vigil. This fast was later extended and became a 40-day period of fasting leading up to Easter. Vatican II called us to

renew the observance of the ancient paschal fast: "... let the paschal fast be kept sacred. Let it be celebrated everywhere on Good Friday and, where possible, prolonged throughout Holy Saturday, so that the joys of the Sunday of the Resurrection may be attained with uplifted and clear mind" (Liturgy, # 110).

Fasting is more than a means of developing self-control. It is often an aid to prayer, as the pangs of hunger remind us of our hunger for God. The first reading on the Friday after Ash Wednesday points out another important dimension of fasting. The prophet Isaiah insists that fasting without changing our behavior is not pleasing to God. "This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own" (Is 58:6-7).

Fasting should be linked to our concern for those who are forced to fast by their poverty, those who suffer from the injustices of our economic and political structures, those who are in need for any reason. Thus fasting, too, is linked to living out our baptismal promises. By our Baptism, we are charged with the responsibility of showing Christ's love to the world, especially to those in need. Fasting can help us realize the suffering that so many people in our world experience every day, and it should lead us to greater efforts to alleviate that suffering.

Abstaining from meat traditionally also linked us to the poor, who could seldom afford meat for their meals. It can do the same today if we remember the purpose of abstinence and embrace it as a spiritual link to those whose diets are sparse and simple. That should be the goal we set for ourselves—a sparse and simple meal. Avoiding meat while eating lobster misses the whole point!

Almsgiving: It should be obvious at this point that almsgiving, the third traditional pillar, is linked to our baptismal commitment in the same way. It is a sign of our care for those in need and an expression of our gratitude for all that God has given to us. Works of charity and the promotion of justice are integral elements of the Christian way of life we began when we were baptized.

+ + + + + + +

Excerpted from <http://www.catholic.org>
"Frequently Asked Questions about Lent."