

## Fr. Martin's Reflection – February 18, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome to the first week of Lent. So, what's on the Lenten menu? What have you planned to take on or give up? At the beginning of Lent the Church sets before us Jesus' reflections on the three great cardinal works of the spiritual life: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We are invited to become involved in all three, so it is only right that we should reflect on Jesus' advice which is the word of God for us today.

### **Prayer**

The Jews were required to pray at set times of the day: at nine in the morning, at noontime, and at three in the afternoon. As ordained clergy, we too are required to pray at set times of the day: morning, midday, and evening. For the laity there is no requirement, but it is strongly encouraged. The laity are encouraged to take time to pray in the morning as the day begins and, in the evening/night as the day ends. The Church also has structured prayers at noon and evening: The Angelus. So, where does prayer factor into our Lenten journey?

### **Fasting**

Like prayer, fasting was an important part of the spiritual tradition and was a sign of repentance. Fasting was always linked to repentance; if it is not, it can be reduced simply to the theology of Weight Watchers. What are we to fast from? St John Chrysostom wrote: "I tell you it is possible to fast while not fasting. Is this a riddle? By enjoying food while having no taste for sin. That is a better kind of fasting." We are first obliged to fast from sin. There is no point in missing dinner and spending the evening demolishing our neighbor. We must starve our sins before we starve our stomachs, and that will keep fasting linked to repentance.

### **Almsgiving**

When it comes to giving alms to the poor, Jesus thinks little of those who make sure that the trumpet sounds first, so that people are paying attention before the gift is given. What can we give? We should share the most precious gifts we have received: love, compassion, understanding and forgiveness. That is what forgiveness is for – it is for giving. "With all his giving, he never gives himself." We are asked to give ourselves, and in that we have the marvelous example of Jesus. He gave generously of himself. He was at great pains to share with others his time, his energy, his many gifts. In the end he gave himself away and shares with us his body and blood.

So, the Church asks us at the beginning of Lent to renew our own lives in the spiritual works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, and to heed Jesus' advice from the gospel read on Ash Wednesday.

May this Lent be a time of great renewal of our personal relationship between God and self.

*Fr. Martin*