

JMJ

7<sup>th</sup> Sun. OT

The next quarter's ministry schedule is available in the back of church. Please be sure to pick one up on the way out and check to see when you're scheduled for a given ministry. Ash Wednesday is this week, with Masses at 8:00am and 6:00pm. And Stations of the Cross will be at 6:00pm on Friday.

Also, please make sure to pick up a bulletin and read what I wrote in there this week. We're going to have to replace the heating system in the school. This will require planning and obviously significant financial resources. My article in the bulletin provides as many details that I have at the present time. As we proceed I will be sure to keep everyone informed.

+ As a kid I did not look forward to Lent, it meant giving up things I liked. And the younger you are the more time seems to move slowly. The six weeks of Lent seemed like they drug on forever. And even now, giving up certain things and taking up certain penances, they're still not pleasant or enjoyable. But I have come to look forward to Lent in a very real way, as I'm sure many of you do. And it's because on some level we realize there's a great opportunity to be had here.

We recognize that we have some bad habits, that we're somewhat dependent or over attached to worldly goods. And the reason we know these things are a problem is because we understand that they prevent us from enjoying our potential greatness. They hold us back from both perfectly loving God and perfectly receiving His love. That's what it means to be a perfect human, which Jesus exemplifies for us. Even if one doesn't consider the religious aspect, at the very least, we have a subconscious awareness that I could be better, and there's an innate desire for that. If we weren't called to greatness, why would we feel disappointed or uncomfortable at our shortcomings? Why would there be that nagging incentive to improve. Our Lord speaks to this desire, he addresses this potential, in the Gospel when he says, "be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Jesus' teachings the last couple weeks have been difficult, downright demanding. In light of our human weaknesses and the ways of the world, it all seems a bit absurd, even unrealistic. I mean how often do you hear it acknowledged, no one's perfect. But Jesus is acting as though this is a natural expectation...that we truly become like God. And it's because this is the nature of our human vocation, that we enjoy such a union with God that we become perfect. If we're going to enjoy the destination God has in mind for us, we not only have to desire it more than anything, there must be a shared likeness between us and God.

When two people in a relationship don't enjoy a degree of union, or much in common, the relationship cannot be enjoyed....there's not even really a relationship to speak of. This is why Lent is to our advantage, truly beneficial. By giving up worldly things we direct our desires more perfectly to God. In desiring God we come to desire what He desires. The penances we do enable us to follow Christ more perfectly, which entails inconveniences and degrees of suffering.

To live the Christian life is to actively desire Heaven, to grow in union with God. This requires action on our part, to bring about the necessary changes because we're not born ready. And if we've lived contrary to God for some time, this requires much action. St. Augustine says these efforts and action will only be effective to the extent that we free ourselves from desires leading to infatuation with this world. This is why during Lent we choose to correct those desires, to give up those things that we've grown dependent upon.

It's helpful to view our soul as a vessel meant for possessing the grace and love of God, but one which we have filled with a dirty and sour liquid. The vessel must be emptied of these contents. But that's just the first step, the vessel must then be cleansed, scrubbed clean. It has to be made ready for its new possession. This is the purpose of our Lenten penances, doing things that aren't comfortable, things we'd rather not do. This provides us with a spiritual strength, no

longer slaves to ourselves but having dominion over ourselves for the sake of loving and serving God. We're made strong so as to bear the cross that unites us to Christ.

But this noble endeavor, to engage the Christian life and become perfect comes down to embracing the fact that we are not self-reliant. We're utterly helpless by ourselves. True Christian perfection is possible only if it is given to us, which requires a humble receptivity to God's grace. Jesus demanding perfection out of us, it encourages the greatness that we desire; but it's his willingness to give it that provides the confidence that we can become perfect, if only we are ready to cooperate.