

Dear Parishioners,

Lent is a call to holiness, and it is a season with a definite beginning and ending. However, the call to holiness does not end with Lent. As a matter of fact that call deepens throughout every season of our lives: Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall; Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time; childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and old age. We are forever being called to a deeper, more loving relationship with God. What is crucial is the response we make to that call.

Jesus suggests in Matthew's Gospel that we try to do three things; pray, fast, and give alms (see Matthew 6:1-6; 16-18, we read this gospel passage every Ash Wednesday). We pray because every loving relationship requires communication. We fast because when we empty ourselves of those things we long for we find that God is more present in the emptiness we feel. We give alms because there is a tremendous amount of poverty in this world and we can do something about it. The gospels call us to care for the poor.

Perhaps one of the best responses to this call to holiness is to be joyful people even in the face of all the difficulties and hardships of our day. There are many reasons for us to be down; people are grieving, we are at war, sickness has become a powerful force in the lives of people we know, families are dealing with brokenness and pain, the list could go on and on.

What a powerful fast it would be if we could do whatever it takes for us to be joyful even in the midst of our difficulties. I am not talking about being in denial here. Instead, I am talking about making a decision each day to laugh, to smile, to be happy simply

by accepting our lives as they are. Joy is a profoundly spiritual virtue.

What greater holiness could there be for us than to rejoice in the loving relationship we share with God? Could you imagine what our worship would be like if we were all to "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord?" One of the best petitions we can raise to God is to ask for the gift of joy.

What more generous offering can we make than to share what we have with the poor, rejoicing in the fact that they are being helped by our compassion? So often it seems we have to be urged, reluctantly at best, to give of ourselves to others who are in need. Charity breeds joy, and joy increases charity. It is always amazing to see how grateful people can be when we are generous, but a greater motivation to give is simply because we are joyful people. Because we are joyful people, we are also generous people.

León Bloy, a French Philosopher, said, "*Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.*" My hope for us this Lenten season is that we will discover how near God is to us as we look forward to celebrating with true joy the resurrection of Jesus Christ this Easter, and in every season of our lives.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel