

of Time" and it asks you to look at your "Spiritual Life." What do I do to bring me closer to God: attend Mass every Sunday and Holy Day, personal daily prayer, prayer at meals and prayer together with family. This is Catholicism 101. And if you do just those three things - Sunday Mass, daily personal prayer and family prayer, especially at meals - it will change your life. Beyond those basics we have other suggestions: Pray the rosary, make a novena (nine days) of prayer, attend an adult education class or make retreat.

I want to say it again: If you make a commitment of time to the Lord, if you give him first priority in your life, everything else will fall in place. Start with God and you will be amazed the difference it will make in your family and ultimately in your community.

Don't waste this crisis. God sent it to us for a reason. It is the moment to get our priorities straight. Perhaps in addition to the financial crisis you are facing a difficult family problem or some serious health issue. Do not waste the crisis. It is a call from God. Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the moment to reorder priorities - and to give first place to God. As a sign of our humility before God, we receive ashes on our forehead on Ash Wednesday and with that we enter Lent.

Knee Mail

You may have heard about a way of communicating even better than e-mail. It is called "knee-mail." It involves getting down on one's knees and speaking directly to God. You can send messages like this: "God, help my friend who has this terrible problem...Jesus, give that young person peace and hope...Guide our leaders...Help me. I don't know what to do."

Knee mail, of course, is another name for prayer. On this First Sunday of Lent we see the greatest example. Before uttering one word in his public ministry, Jesus spent forty days in silent prayer - focused on the Father. This Sunday I ask you to follow Jesus' example. Put God the Father first in your life.

I know what some of you are thinking: Sounds good, but where could I find time for those things? That's where fasting comes in. I asked our middle school students to give examples of fasting. They of course suggested things like giving up ice cream, chocolates and desert, but they suggested other things as well: video games, chat rooms, television and the Internet. Less e-mail, more knee-mail. Lent is a time to re-order our lives - by praying, fasting and giving - to put God first. Consider Jesus' words, his first public words after forty days of prayer and fasting: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel."

Lent with C.S. Lewis

Fr. Phil Bloom

To help you enter more deeply into this season, I made available a pamphlet: *A Clean Heart Create in Me*. It contains daily Lenten reflections from the writings of C.S. Lewis. I first discovered Lewis when I was a young priest (a friend gave me a copy of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). Since then I have read all his works, except for highly technical ones, many times over. He has helped me through periods of dryness and doubt. If you have not read him, this Lenten pamphlet will give a taste. And if you are already a Lewis' fan, you will enjoy the daily reflections. His reflection for the First Sunday of Lent helps understand the meaning of temptation:

"What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they could 'be like gods' - could set up on their

own as if they had created themselves - be their own masters - invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history - money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery - the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy."

Today's Gospel states tersely that Jesus was "tempted by Satan." (Mk 1:13) While Luke and Matthew elaborate on what the devil offered him, Mark places before us a stark mystery: Jesus, "the Son of God" (1:1) experienced Satanic temptations. How that can be I do not know, but in his person he must have faced everything we do - and more. However, there was a crucial difference. Whereas you and I tend to fall before the smallest test - a perceived slight, a seductive image, quick financial gain - Jesus stood up to man's enemy.

Jesus came to set things right. He alone could do it. Why? Because of his relationship to the Father. He existed before the world began in the loving union of Father and Son. From that energy, the world was created. But Satan and then our first parents stepped out of that harmony. As Lewis observed, we are constantly looking for some kind of happiness on our own. If only we could just find the right person or the right job or the right vacation or the right fitness program... With typical bluntness, Lewis explains why such a desperate search ultimately disappoints us:

"The reason why it can never succeed is this: God made us, invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

Mark tells us Jesus spent forty days in a desert - a place inhabited by wild beasts, but that "angels ministered to him." Here in Seattle we have a difficult time conjuring up the image of a desert, yet we do know wild beasts - those chaotic forces within our souls and surrounding us. Fortunately God sends us good angels - the ones who did not abandon the original harmony. Accepting their ministry, we can find the way back.

EVENTS

✿ *A Women`s Lenten Retreat Weekend* is being offered at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga on March 6-8. During this "Year of St. Paul" our focus will be on the apostle Paul and his message for today's world. Call 905 278-5229 to make a reservation or for information.

✿ *The Teopoli Summer Experience is looking for volunteers and hired staff.*

Do you enjoy working with children ages 6 to 16? Then we are looking for you. We need young adults to live and work at Teopoli (Muskoka) for 10 consecutive weeks this summer as counsellors and lifeguards. For more information visit our website www.teopoli.org or call Joe at 416- 243-7319.