

Dear Parish Family, Praised be Jesus Christ!

I write this letter to you as we enter the Holy Season of Lent to offer some practical and spiritual advice in order that we might truly enter into this Holy Season, as well as to describe some exciting events that are coming up in our parish.

To begin the Season of Lent, Ash Wednesday will be celebrated on Wednesday, February 14th. We have two options to attend Mass on the East Side, both of which will offer Ashes. There will be a 12 Noon Mass at St. Peter, and a 7pm Mass at St. Monica. If neither of these times work for you, I will also be offering a Mass at Notre Dame High School for our Catholic School community at 10am on Wednesday. You are definitely welcome!

Although Ash Wednesday is not a Holy Day of Obligation, I highly recommend starting Lent off on the right foot by attending Mass. There are two options the Roman Missal gives the priest for the prayer for the distribution of Ashes: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel;" and "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Personally, I prefer the former. It is a beautiful reminder of what we as Christians are called to do: Repent from our sins, and believe in the truth of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. We are also called to spread that truth which we believe to the corners of the world in thought, word and deed...in both what we preach, and how we live...

**Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence.** For members of the Latin Catholic Church, the norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 60.

When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. The norms concerning abstinence from meat are binding upon members of the Latin Catholic Church from age 14 onwards - there is no upper age limit. This is a reminder of the penitential season that we are in to prepare ourselves for Holy Week, the Easter Triduum and the Resurrection of Our Lord at Easter.

*"Prior to the Second Vatican Council complete abstinence was to be observed on all Fridays of the year, Ash Wednesday, Vigils of the Immaculate Conception and Christmas, and on Holy Saturday." Some Catholics piously still adhere to this practice, although, no longer mandated by Church Law...*

Traditionally, faithful Catholics prayerfully consider extending the ritual of fasting by giving up something during the entirety of Lent. Whether that be the use of social media, watching your favorite TV show, or giving up chocolate; a desire to fast from things that we might otherwise indulge in, helps us better connect with Our Lord on the Cross.

In seminary, my spiritual director encouraged me to give up something during Lent as well as take on a holy practice such as praying the Rosary daily, or attending Daily Mass, or offering additional sacrifice or penance. The idea, of course, in giving up something, or adding something to our prayer is supposed to continue long after the season of Lent has come to a close. Do not waste this season - allow whatever you may do to change your life for the better, to better unite yourself to Our Lord on the Cross.

**During the Season of Lent, I will be offering a Holy Hour with confessions available on Wednesdays from 5-6pm at St. Peter. We will continue to offer the Holy Hour from 5-6 and Mass at St. Monica on Friday evenings.**

**Following our Holy Hour at St. Peter, I will be offering a series from FORMED.org called *Forgiven*, from 6-7pm in the Pope St. John Paul II Room. “*Forgiven explores the grace and healing offered in Confession and shows how this sacrament of mercy reveals the depth and bounty of God’s love. By looking at God’s revelation of his mercy in Scripture and making a step-by-step examination of the Rite itself, Forgiven communicates God’s invitation to each one of us to come experience his indescribable love in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.*”**

I encourage you all to attend. This will all begin on Wednesday, February 21st and continue through March 21st.

**Stations of the Cross will be held each Friday of Lent beginning at 7:15pm.**

**February 16th, March 2nd, and 16th; the Stations will be held at St. Monica  
February 23rd, March 9th and 23rd; the Stations will be held as St. Peter**

This year, the entirety of the Easter Triduum will be held at St. Monica. We have two individuals preparing to enter the Church for the East Side - please remember them in your prayers during Lent. Holy Thursday, the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, will be on Thursday, March 29th at 7pm. Good Friday will be at 3pm on Friday March 30th and the Easter Vigil will begin at 8:30pm on March 31st. The Easter Sunday Masses will be the normal 8:30 at St. Peter and 11:30 at St. Monica. Please plan to attend the entirety of the Easter Triduum, the Holiest time of the Church year.

#### **CONFIRMATION:**

Please mark your calendars for the celebration of Confirmation this year. Because we are now a 5-parish consortium, Father Joe, in consultation with Fr. Ventura, and myself, has asked the Bishop to hold one county-wide confirmation at St. Mary in Portsmouth. This is because St. Mary is the largest Church in the county, and can accommodate the expected large crowd. Confirmation is scheduled for the 12 Noon Mass on Sunday, April 8th; Divine Mercy Sunday. Bishop Campbell will be the principal celebrant of the liturgy and Father Joe, Ventura and I will be concelebrating.

***Following Confirmation, there will be a consortium-wide Divine Mercy celebration beginning at 3pm at Holy Redeemer. We will offer Divine Mercy devotions and the Sacrament of Confession. Please plan to attend.***

There will be a **mandatory** Confirmation Retreat for all Confirmandi on Saturday, April 7th at the St. Mary Center from 9am-2pm. Please plan accordingly.

Confirmandi are reminded that Sunday Mass and Holy Days are obligatory and should “sign in” at each Mass. All absentee’s are noted.

### **FIRST COMMUNION:**

I know it is a bit early, but I wanted to get a jump start on describing how First Communion will look this year for the East Side Parishes as there has been a few changes.

As you know, this year is typically St. Monica’s year to hold First Communion. I would like to let you know that I have decided to hold First Communion at St. Peter’s instead this year.

Let me explain my reasoning: As you know, St. Monica’s parishioner and seminarian, Kyle Tennant, is scheduled to be ordained a Transitional Deacon by Bishop Campbell on Friday, May 4th. As a newly ordained deacon, it is customary for them to preach their “first homily” at their home parish, the place and community in which they first heard God’s call.

Because it is my responsibility as the Parochial Vicar-Administrator to offer the First Communion Mass and to preach it; I felt it best to move First Communion to St. Peter in order that Kyle could preach at the 11:30 Mass at St. Monica. It was impossible to move the First Communion to the week prior due to scheduling, or the week after due to my departure for Rome on May 7th.

Let me be clear when I say that this decision in no way had anything to do with “who’s church had the most kids receiving First Communion,” or “which space was bigger to hold the crowd.” I do not care about those things as I have always seen St. Monica and St. Peter as the same: One parish under one pastor.

That being said, St. Monica will hold the First Communion in 2019 and the rotation will continue as per usual.

We plan to have a reception for the First Communicates following the 8:30am Mass at St. Peter hall as well as a reception for Kyle in the basement of St. Monica following the 11:30am Mass. Please add both to your schedules.

I encourage you to make the best of this Lenten Season. Renew your commitment to Our Lord, who offers Himself to us freely upon the altar of sacrifice. Allow this to change your heart, so that we may fulfill God's call to preach the Gospel to the corners of the world!

May God Bless you this Lenten Season and always!

*Fr. Stephen Smith*

Father Stephen Smith  
Parochial Vicar-Administrator  
St. Peter/St. Monica