

FINDING FORGIVENESS AND GRACE

It can be easy to think of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as something negative, a punishment, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Rather than an encounter with an angry judge, it's the merciful hand of God, reaching for us, in an invitation to receive His love and forgiveness.

"It's God reaching down to grab us by the hand and say, 'I love you, keep on going; I created you, I understand your weaknesses and failings and I am here to walk with you and strengthen you; I want to show by this sacrament that I want to be with you all the time,'" says Fr. Jim Murphy.

Fr. Murphy has been a priest for 61 years, and although he is now retired, he serves by celebrating Mass and hearing Confessions at St. Theresa Parish, in Ericson. While there are many things that Fr. Murphy loves about being a priest, the Sacrament of Reconciliation stands out for him.

"All of us became priests to save people from hell," he says. "Confession is the primary way of getting rid of mortal sin, so it's very important in that regard."

Owen Seamann, a parishioner at St. Michael's and father to five, grew up going to Confession as a child, but has found that his appreciation of the sacrament has grown in recent years, especially since having children of his own.

"God loves us and wants us to be close to Him, so that's why He gave us this sacrament," Owen says.

"I hope my kids know that they can be forgiven if they screw up," he adds, with a chuckle.



Owen Seamann grew up with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but his appreciation of Confession has grown in a particular way since having children.

continued on page 2



FINDING FORGIVENESS AND GRACE

continued from front cover

While most people immediately think of how the Sacrament of Reconciliation gives us forgiveness from sin, it's also important to remember that going to Confession gives us grace and help to grow closer to God and avoid sin in the future.

"The sacrament itself has the power to strengthen us against sin," Fr. Murphy says. "The sacrament is a source of continuous strengthening nourishment for the soul."

*"The priest is a spiritual doctor, and when we sin, it means our soul has an illness. You're coming to a spiritual doctor to give you advice about how to avoid sin. Sometimes when you go to Confession, the priest says words that totally inspire you, and sometimes, something they say really sets you on fire."
– Fr. Murphy*

"The priest is a spiritual doctor, and when we sin, it means our soul has an illness," he continues. "You're coming to a spiritual doctor to give you advice about how to avoid sin. Sometimes when you go to Confession, the priest says words that totally inspire you, and sometimes, something he says really sets you on fire. The priest is gifted with the grace to give council and

sometimes it is very powerful."

Fr. Murphy encourages parishioners to not allow fear or shame to hold them back from receiving God's mercy and forgiveness.

"I'm nervous, too," Fr. Murphy says. "I don't like to admit that I've done wrong and confessing is a nervous thing."

"The priest has heard it all, don't worry about surprising him," Owen says. "Since I've been going more regularly, it's easier to go."

As a priest, Fr. Murphy shares that, sometimes, he finds himself in humble awe at the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

"It's such a great privilege for people to trust you enough to unburden themselves," he says. "It takes a lot of trust to admit your wrongs. I feel very privileged that God has granted me the power to forgive those who admit their wrongs. I'm a sinner, too."

Whatever wrongs you have done, Fr. Murphy encourages you to return to God in Confession. He reminds us that there's no sin that cannot be forgiven.

"I challenge people – don't think that you can possibly do something bigger than God can forgive," Father says. "You're not that powerful."

"Jesus loves you so much that He died on the cross to save you – that's how much He cares for your salvation," he adds. "He reaches out now to grant you forgiveness."

Fr. Murphy encourages people to attend Confession on a monthly basis, if possible, and especially during Lent, in preparation for the celebration of Easter.

"The Church calls us to a time of penance during Lent," he says. "It's the Church's invitation to do penance and be forgiven and grow in grace. We don't know how long we have, and we're pushing our luck if we're holding on to sin."

Fr. Murphy is available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation at St. Theresa's, most local penance services, as well as by appointment. To reach him, please call the St. Michael's parish office at 308-497-2662 or his cell phone at 308-223-9001.

A Letter From Our Pastor

LENT IS MORE THAN PREPARATION FOR EASTER

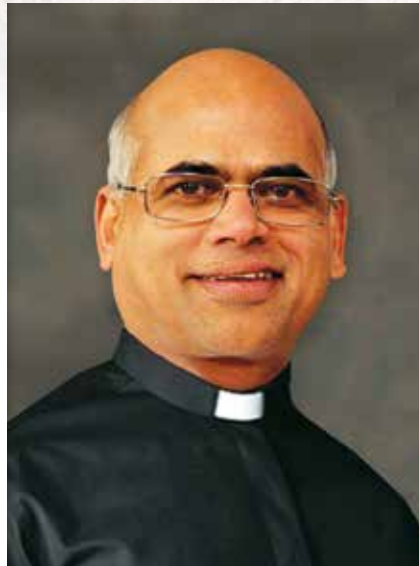
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In 2013, Pope Francis issued his first significant work. It was what is called an “apostolic exhortation” titled *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium* in Latin). While Rome may use fancy words for some of these things, an “exhortation” of this sort does not change any official Church rules or traditions. However, it does offer advice and encouragement about how we should live our lives.

Pope Francis offers this kind of guidance on a regular basis, but this one in particular seems to present us with suggestions that are worthy of our consideration, especially during Lent. The pope called us to become missionary disciples: “The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24).

Speaking about his exhortation, Pope Francis said, “One of the riches of the Second Vatican Council was to remind the Church of the two ‘lenses’ of the season of Lent: baptismal and penitential.” In fact, Vatican II noted specifically, “The two elements which are especially characteristic of Lent – the recalling of baptism or the preparation for it, and penance – should be given greater emphasis in the liturgy and in liturgical catechesis. It is by means of them that the Church prepared the faithful for the celebration of Easter, while they hear God’s word more frequently and devote more time to prayer” (*Companion to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1348).

It might be well for us to keep these in mind during Lent. There were promises made during



our baptism, and this is the time of year to try to fulfill those promises, in addition to reaffirming them. We are given various opportunities to renew these promises, and we may tend to do it automatically without a thought. Now, however, is the time to think. Perhaps during Lent, we can renew these promises as families – and we must not necessarily do it in church or at a Mass. Then, we need to do something during Lent to help each of us understand what that renewal means.

The other important part of Lent pointed out by Pope Francis has to do with penance. Most of us have heard the traditional practices of Lent – fasting, prayer, reception of the Sacraments, and almsgiving. These are things that may bring us closer to Christ. By fasting, we may gain a greater understanding of the hunger the Lord feels for our souls; by increased prayer, we join in union with God; through the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation, we become a greater part of that union with God; through giving alms, we empty ourselves in part, just as Jesus emptied Himself for us on the cross.

This is a time to do more than prepare for Easter. This is a time to change how we may approach living and our faith. God bless you now and throughout this holiest of seasons.

Sincerely yours in Christ and His Mother,

Fr. Antony
Pastor



l'Etang-Rey, Haiti

Picture a mountainous region, where life is not easy. The roads are few, the terrain is rough, and needs like electricity and water are not readily available. Most of the people here are farmers, living in extreme poverty as they work a harsh and unrelenting land. Despite these circumstances, the men, women and children possess an authentic joy and contentment. The population is dispersed across the region, but they do have a center around which their lives gravitate – the local Catholic church, St. Raphael, and the parish school. This community, located in l'Etang-Rey, Haiti, is the “twin” parish of Families in Faith.

A “twinning parish” relationship describes the connection and interaction between parishes in two different parts of the world. Forming this kind of partnership is a valuable way to share in the culture and faith life of a parish thousands of miles away. The Twinning Parish Program of the Americas, or PTPA, was founded in 1978 by Harry Hosey, a Catholic who became dedicated to outreach in Haiti after witnessing the poverty there while he was on a cruise vacation in



A teaching session in St. Raphael that took place during the 2014 visit of Families in Faith parishioners to the twin parish



The twin parish of Families in Faith – St. Raphael Church in l'Etang-Rey, Haiti

“THE COMMUNITY OF TWIN PARISHES

the 1950s. Today, hundreds of parishes around the United States participate in twinning parish ministries.

Sacred Heart has been partnered with St. Raphael for many years now, and Fr. Antony is seeking to grow our Twinning Parish Ministry, which now includes the parishes of St. Michael and St. Theresa as well. Over the last few years, more contact has been made between the parishes, including Fr. Riche Emmanuel’s recent visit from l’Etang-Rey.

“We have been sending money to St. Raphael for awhile now,” explains Tom Nekoliczak, coordinator of Sacred Heart’s Twinning Parish Ministry. “In the last two years, we have started doing more and more. When Fr. Antony came, he realized that there are a lot of other things that can be done for them and wanted to help.

“So, Father started this committee that now has nine people on it, and he wants to send someone down there once a year,” Tom continues. “A group of us went down for the first time two years ago to find out what it was like and help build a little addition onto the school. Last year, Fr. Antony went down, and after his trip down there and now Fr. Riche’s visit up here, we have even more ideas about what we can do for them.”

Fr. Riche, who was here visiting our Families in Faith parishes for part of January and February, greatly appreciated the opportunity to come and spend time getting to know Fr. Antony and our parishioners. Fr. Antony had invited Fr. Riche here so that the Haitian priest could both improve his English and tell our parishes about the needs of St. Raphael.

This recent visit was certainly a success – when asked about his time spent with Families in Faith, Fr. Riche has only great things to say!

“I don’t have the words to explain this good experience,” he says. “I experienced collaboration and hospitality in Greeley, such a beautiful community. I shared the faith with the community and I also learned English. Fr. Antony is a good man – he helps me learn English and he supports me. We have a good relationship with St. Michael and St.

FAMILIES IN FAITH CAN TRANSFORM RELATIONSHIP



The Families in Faith Twinning Parish Ministry Team – (from left) Tom Nekoliczak, Fr. Antony Thekkekara, Fr. Riche of Haiti, Arlene Wrzenski, Deb Eschliman, Carol and Dean Seaman, and Janet Klein (Not pictured, Amy McKay and Maggie Smith)

Theresa and Sacred Heart.”

While Fr. Riche says that the greatest benefit of the twinning parish relationship is the prayers offered up by each parish for the other, there are also some more concrete ways in which Families in Faith can help the people at St. Raphael.

“Our community is very poor,” he explains. “We don’t have the possibility to pay the teachers. I also want to build a new classroom for the children, and want to be able to give the children their school supplies and a meal. The community doesn’t have a hospital, so I also need help for the health for this community. But education would be the number-one priority because with the education, we can grow ourselves. I’m so happy Families in Faith will help me build the school – with education, the community can transform.”

Fr. Antony is committed to growing the Twinning Parish Ministry at Families in Faith. When he visited l’Etang-Rey last year, he was overwhelmed by the poverty he witnessed there and knew that our parishes could do more to help out.

“I would like to do more,” Fr. Antony affirms. “As Fr. Riche mentioned, the first priority is education. I also believe that education is the best way to take a community forward. I’m convinced that helping the children is the top priority, and that is where I would like to invest my energy.”

For both Fr. Antony and Tom Nekoliczak – like Harry Hosey all those years ago – one trip to visit the community of St. Raphael was all it took to inspire them to want to help our twin parish as much as possible.

“For me, it all kind of started with my daughter, who talked me into going on the trip to Haiti two years ago,” Tom recalls. “Once I went, it was really something. Everyone should take the opportunity to see stuff like this, because it is an eye-opening experience. Everything seems about 30 or 40 years behind us. Up in the mountains, there is no electricity, and to get water, they have to bring jugs and catch it in the streams.”

While we Americans may have more material

resources to share with other parts of the world, in every twin parish relationship, there are many different kinds of gifts given and received on each side. Often, parishes in the United States find a lot to learn when they witness the joy and contentment found even in the poorest of communities.

“When we were in Haiti each evening we would sit and talk about that,” Tom says. “We went down there thinking we were going to help them so much, and all of a sudden we discovered that they can teach us so much. They are such a happy people and they don’t have anything compared to us. Up here, we keep on wanting and wanting things. We talk about how stressed we are in this country, and yet down there they don’t seem to have that. They just seem to be very happy.”

While the people of St. Raphael are thousands of miles away, they, too, are a part of our family in Christ. In praying for one another and in learning about one another’s culture, we all have much to gain. In sharing from our own abundant resources, we are truly serving the Universal Church. And this, after all, is what we are all called to do! That’s the meaning of a twinning parish. Twins of the same Father — God.

“If we look at our lives and compare them to the less fortunate people, whether they are homeless here or in another country, it’s hard to justify not helping anyone in need,” Tom says. “There are so many opportunities for us who live here in our society to lend a helping hand to others, and the Haitian people are just one of them. Helping the less fortunate is something all of us, as Christians, are expected to do.”

We hope that all the parishioners of Families in Faith will be able to serve our Twinning Parish Ministry in some way. As Fr. Riche tells us, with a little help, their community can transform – and we just may experience a transformation of our own in the process!

Interested in finding out more about the Twinning Parish Ministry? There are always opportunities to get involved! Please contact Tom Nekoliczak at 308-571-0238 or nekolitj@hughes.net.

A HISTORY OF



and Lenten Practices

When we approach the start of Lent on Ash Wednesday, we look toward a season of preparation, sacrifice and penance, culminating in Holy Week and the joyous celebrations of Easter. And while the liturgical season of Lent offers us a time for solemn reflection, it is also widely welcomed each year as an opportunity to be drawn closer to our faith.

But just how did this penitential season come to be? And how did the reverent hallmarks of Lent – such as fasting and prayer – become so deeply ingrained in our observance of this season?

To understand the Lenten season, it is important to understand the word “Lent” itself, which is derived from two Anglo-Saxon terms: *lencten*, meaning “spring,” and *lenctentid*, which is the term for both “springtide” and “March.” Lent often falls throughout most of the month of March, and during the transition into (and renewal of) the spring season. In Latin, the corresponding term for “Lent,” *quadragesima*, refers to its dating from the 40th day before Easter.

This brings us to another hallmark of the Lenten season – its length of 40 days. However, Lent was not originally observed for this length of time. During the first three centuries of the Christian era, Easter preparations consisted of three days of fasting and prayer. In some places, this preparation was extended into the entire week prior to Easter – which we now observe as Holy Week. There is also some evidence that, in Rome, Easter preparation was as long as three weeks.

In its early form, Lent was an intense period of spiritual and liturgical preparation for catechumens who were to be baptized at Easter. At the time, many members of the community observed this period of preparation alongside the catechumens. But, as time passed and more people were baptized as infants, the connection between catechumens and Lenten preparation gave way to a focus on the themes of repentance and fasting during Lent for *all* Christians.

It was not until the fourth century – upon the legalization of Christianity – that Lent developed into its current length of 40 days, which mirrored the length of Jesus’ fast and temptation in the desert, as chronicled in Luke 4:1-13.

Yet, interestingly, the Lenten observations of fasting and prayer did not always take place for 40 *consecutive* days. For instance, in Jerusalem, fasting was observed for 40 days, Monday through Friday, but not on Saturday or Sunday – thus, Lent lasted for a total of *eight* weeks. In Rome and the West, fasting took place for six weeks, Monday through Saturday, with Lent being observed over *six* weeks. The practice of fasting for six days over the course of six weeks eventually prevailed, with Ash Wednesday being instituted to account for 40 fasting days prior to Easter.

And as the length of Lenten observance developed over time, so did the observance of fasting itself. At first, some areas of the Church abstained from all meat and animal products, while others made exceptions for certain foods, like fish. And while a person was to only have one meal a day, a smaller repast would be allowed so that manual laborers could maintain their strength throughout the day. Eventually, eating meat was allowed throughout the week, save for Ash Wednesday and on Fridays (in the West).

In fact, two of our most common and beloved Lenten and Easter traditions – the Shrove Tuesday meal and Easter eggs – developed from these early Lenten observations. Initially, abstinence from dairy products was observed during Lent, with dispensations given if pious works had taken place. Eventually, this particular rule of abstinence was relaxed entirely. Today, pre-Lenten pancake breakfasts, Easter egg decoration and egg hunts remain as enjoyable seasonal opportunities for fellowship and fun within our parish families!

“...MEN WHO SUPPORT THE
CHURCH, THEIR PARISHES, AND THE
COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY LIVE”
**OUR KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
COUNCILS #1312 AND #13584**



All the good works done by the Knights of Columbus are based upon their four core principles: Charity, Unity, Fraternity, and Patriotism. And to be sure, charity and service are hallmarks of the Knights. In the past decade worldwide, the Knights have donated \$1.475 billion to charity and given almost 700 million hours in support of the Church and charitable works. At a recent audience, Pope Francis commended and thanked the Knights. “On this occasion, I wish to express my gratitude for the unfailing support the Knights of Columbus have always provided to the Church, to the Holy See, and to me personally. This support is both financial and spiritual. It can be seen in your daily prayers, sacrifices, and the apostolic works of so many Knights in their local councils, in their parishes, and in their communities.”

Thanks to the efforts of Fr. Michael J. McGivney in New Haven, Conn., the Connecticut State Legislature chartered the first Knights of Columbus Council in 1882. From that one Council, the Knights have grown from a few members to more than 15,000 Councils and almost 2 million members in the United States and 16 other countries.

We are blessed here at Families in Faith with two Knights Councils – Bishop O’Connor Council #1312, which is associated with Sacred Heart in Greeley, and St. Michael Council #13584, which is attached to St. Michael in Spalding, and also serves St. Theresa in Ericson. The Grand Knight at Sacred Heart is Chuck Sweeney and the Grand Knight in Spalding is Jerry Smith.

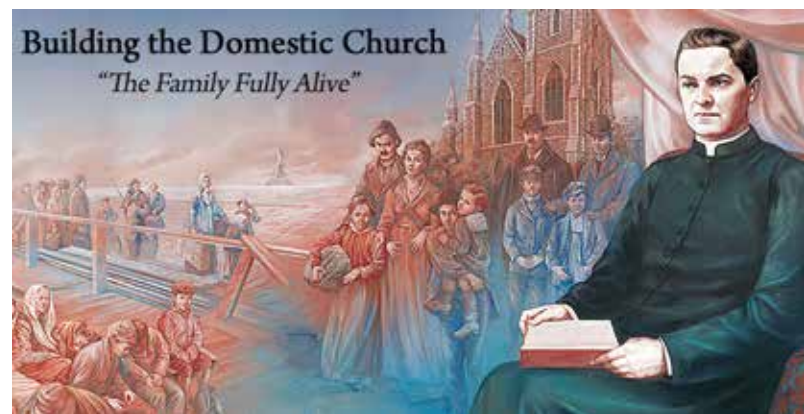
“Our Knights are men who support the Church, their parishes, and the communities where they live,” Chuck says. “These are farm communities, and service organizations like the

Knights of Columbus provide a lot to the area in terms of service, events and examples of what it means to be a Catholic.”

As Chuck notes, at one time, there were four parishes in this area, including one in Scotia. Unfortunately, the parish in Scotia closed – so in general, Council #1312 serves Greeley and Scotia, and Council #13584 takes care of Spalding and Ericson. The Councils work together on some things, but in general, operate independently.

“But no matter how you look at it, we all serve the communities and the parishes,” Chuck says.

“In our communities, we oversee a free throw contest for the youngsters, visit the care home, and have lots of activities at Christmas,” he adds.



The Council in Spalding provides similar opportunities and is involved in comparable ways.

During Lent both Councils host a Friday night fish fry up until Easter - with the exception of Good Friday. Fish fries in both locations begin at 5:30 p.m. – in the church basement in Greeley, and in the parish center in Spalding. There is a set price for adults and children 10 and under, while those under 5 are free. The menus are

continued on back cover

Non-profit organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit # 32993
Spalding, NE 68665

FAMILIES IN FAITH

150 E. Marguerite St. | P.O. Box 310
Spalding, NE 68665 | 308.497.2662

OUR KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS COUNCILS #1312 AND #13584 *continued from page 7*

similar, featuring deep-fried fish, baked beans, French fries, macaroni and cheese, dessert, and a beverage. The fish fry is also organized on Fridays so that parishioners can gather together for the Stations of the Cross either before or after eating.

The Knights are a valuable organization and men are encouraged to consider membership. Knights are givers, not receivers. They are dedicated to making a difference in the parish and building a better future for many.



Keep An Eye Out!

Don't forget to check the bulletin for our Easter Triduum schedule and details regarding Stations of the Cross, held every Friday of Lent at 5:30 p.m. at Sacred Heart, and at 7 p.m. at St. Michael's.

*For more information, or to become a member, please contact:
Grand Knight Chuck Sweeney at 308-223-0145 or Financial Secretary John Smyth at 308-428-3065 for the Greeley Council;
Grand Knight Jerry Smith at 308-497-2346 for the Spalding Council.*

MASS SCHEDULE:

7 p.m. Saturday - St. Michael in Spalding | **7 a.m. Sunday** - St. Michael in Spalding
9 a.m. Sunday - Sacred Heart in Greeley | **11 a.m. Sunday** - St. Theresa in Ericson