



FROM THE DESK OF FR. MIKE

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Lent. I will be using my articles in this prayerful season to reflect on spiritual truths and spiritual themes that can deepen our friendship and relationship with Jesus. There are tried and true spiritual practices handed on from one generation to the next. May your efforts this Lent, draw you deeper into relationship with Jesus.

On Ash Wednesday, we prayed Psalm 51, “a clean heart create for me, O God.” We take the time, make the effort, commit to spiritual exercises privately and communally. May any time, any effort, allow us to realize the presence of God’s grace that makes all of the difference in the lives of people of faith.

In the book, *Seeing with the Heart: A Guide to Navigating Life’s Adventures*, Fr. Kevin O’Brien, SJ wrote, “Growing up, I loved the certainty provided by my religious instruction over twelve years of Catholic schooling. I knew where I stood. In this “checklist” approach to my faith, I was told what I could do and not do and what calling myself a Catholic required me to profess (even if I didn’t always understand what I was saying). As I got older and experienced the more complicated realities of human life, my mind and heart outgrew this approach. All those years of religious formation in my home, school, and parish were invaluable in providing a sturdy foundation to ground me, but as I left for college, I realized how much I needed a more adult relationship with God.”

We are busy at the Church of St. Mary preparing our students and their families for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation, and Eucharist. This sacramental foundation will be there for the students throughout their lives, when they choose to focus on Jesus and continue to follow him. For all followers of Jesus, there comes a moment when we realize we have a foundation, but we need to build a ‘more adult relationship with God.’ For Fr. O’Brien, the moment took place while he was away at college. How do we in Lent, in life continue to be spirit-led, growing in a mature relationship with God? May your participation in the Lenten activities, Lenten Masses, Lenten Mission, and Lenten Stations of the Cross be part of that maturing process.

The following story caused me to pause, to pray and to thank God for holding my hand so often in the first sixty-one years of my life. “Once upon a time a man was walking across a bridge in life, became scared and prayed, “God, can I hold your hand so I may not fall?” God said, “no my child, I will hold your hand.”

He asked, “What is the difference?” God replied, “If you hold my hand and something happens, you might let go, but if I hold your hand, no matter what happens, I will never let go.” This Lent may God and your maturing faith help you to trust, to know, and to give thanks for God holding your hand tightly and lovingly.

This coming Friday, February 23, is our Lenten Fish Fry. You are invited to come to the parish, before or after the Stations of the Cross and enjoy a wonderful Lenten meal. We did encourage advance ticket purchases but we welcome people walking in this coming Friday evening at the Upper Grade Center School gym. All are welcome – come and share friendship and fellowship with friends and fellow parishioners. Your pastor encourages you to give up doing dishes this Friday and attend the Church of St. Mary Fish Fry. See you there.

Lenten devotional booklets, *Conversion to Christ*, which feature short reflections by Pope Francis, Fr. Henri Nouwen, and St. Mother Teresa, are available at the entrances to the church.

May God bless us with clean hearts these Lenten days,