

SUNDAY OFFERING - February 12, 2012

Envelopes/Pre-Authorized Giving Program \$11,132.50 Loose \$1,216.18

WE PLEDGE 5 percent . . . recent contributions include - CHALICE, \$524.81; Keewatin/The Pas, \$620.36; SERENA Saskatchewan, \$432.08.

Thank You.

“He rose picked up his mat at once and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’” Mark 2:12. Have you taken any time lately to think about how truly good God has been to you? God may not have to cure your paralysis if God has already given you the gift of mobility. But do we

glorify and thank God for such simple gifts as sight, and speech, and general health? Do we generously give back to God in proportion to all the many blessings God has given to us?

BAPTISM Expectant parents please contact the parish office one month prior to the baptism date to arrange for baptism preparation and for the celebration. The next baptism preparation classes are Wednesday, April 25 and Wednesday May 2. Baptism will be celebrated May 6. Please call Arch McKay for more information at 374-1425.

MARRIAGE Arrangements for marriage can be made by contacting the parish priest eight months prior to the date of marriage. This will provide adequate time for documentation and the diocesan required marriage preparation program. A preparation program is offered through Holy Spirit parish. This program is intended not only for engaged couples but also for couples considering engagement and marriage. Please call Arch McKay, 373-0993 or the parish office, 374-1425 for information and to register. Catholic Family Services, 244-7773, also offers a marriage preparation program. Please check the diocesan website saskatoonrcdiocese.com for more opportunities for marriage preparation.

CHILDREN’S LITURGY The program takes place during the readings and homily at Sunday Mass. It is suitable for children ages 3 to pre-First Eucharist. Parents, young people and anyone interested in teaching children please call Shannon Granger, 955-0089 if you wish to help.

NEW IN THE PARISH? MOVING? Please help us keep parish records up-to-date. It assists us to serve you. Please complete the following and return to the parish office by mail or in the weekend collection basket. Thank you for your assistance.

NEW PARISHIONER REGISTRATION/CHANGE OF ADDRESS

NAME _____

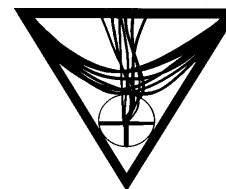
ADDRESS _____

POSTAL CODE _____ TELEPHONE _____

EMAIL _____

PARISH OFFERING ENVELOPES? YES _____ NOT AT THIS TIME _____

PRE-AUTHORIZED GIVING PROGRAM YES _____



HOLY SPIRIT PARISH

114 Kingsmere Place
Saskatoon, SK S7J 3V7

Office/Rectory 374-1425

Fax 374-3190

Rectory 664-4548

Email hspirit@shaw.ca

Website holyspiritsaskatoon.ca

Office Hours 9:00 am-12:00 pm 1:00 pm-5:00 pm

Pastor Rev. Ken Beck

Associate Pastor Rev. Geoffrey Young

Diocesan website saskatoonrcdiocese.com

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME FEBRUARY 19, 2012

God remembers

Sometimes we are the last ones to forget the sins of our past. We said words we regret. We did things we wish we had not. Many of the people we hurt have long forgotten what happened. But sometimes the memory stays deep within us. We are the last ones to forget the sins of our past.

Actually, not quiet the last, God remembers. God remembers even when we have forgotten. But God does not desire to hold a grudge, to torment, or to punish. God desires above all to forgive.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God told ancient Israel to forget the events of the past. Their sins had cost them dearly, but now they could start over. God permitted them to forget that they had abandoned prayer and burdened God with sins. God was ready to forgive.

In rescuing the chosen people from their place of exile and restoring them to Jerusalem, God offered them something new. With a new beginning, they could establish their covenant more strongly.

Significantly, God wanted to forget the past. “Your sins I remember no more.”

Even when it is hard for us to forget our sins, God stands ready to forgive. And to forget even when we remember.

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Alleluia. Alleluia. The Lord sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives. **Alleluia.** Gospel Acclamation

SUNDAY MASS SCHEDULE

Saturday 5:00 pm
Sunday 10:00 am, 12:00 noon, 7:00 pm

PASTORAL ASSOCIATES

Shirley Hyshka Sacramental Preparation
Charlene Nijhawan Ministry of Care
Kelly Wormsbecker Ministry of Care
Arch McKay Christian Initiation of Adults
Marriage Preparation
Baptism Preparation
Stephanie Schlosser Youth Ministry Coordinator

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

Delores McLean

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATOR

Melina Palendat

BUILDING MAINTENANCE

Jack Altrogge

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

Sheila Koch, Chair
Jeannette Chicoine Darroch
Jason Cody
Lee Hergott
Marlene Kuch
Curtis Mann
Barb Meier
Eugene Paquin
Sarah Sehn
David Smith
Jim Wilson

PARISH FINANCE COMMITTEE

Loretta Simonot, Chair Pat Pitka
Ed Solie Basil Waslen

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS 8905

Grand Knight - Ed Yuzyk, 374-0448
Deputy Grand Knight

- Shawn Kuin, 974-3017

Meeting - Monday, February 28 - Knights, and all parishioners, are invited to hear Sr. Teresita Kambeitz, OSU give a talk on 'Forgiveness.' Please join us on Monday, February 28, 7:00 pm in the parish hall.

THIS WEEK AT HOLY SPIRIT

Monday, February 20

Tuesday, February 21
8:30 am Mass
1:00 pm Funeral
5:30 pm Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper
7:00 pm Christian Initiation of Adults
7:15 pm Catholic Women's League Book Club

ASH WEDNESDAY, February 22

8:30 am Mass
7:00 pm Mass

Thursday, February 23

8:30 am Mass
10:30 am Mass - Stensrud Lodge

Friday, February 24

8:30 am Mass
9:00 am - 12:00 noon Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

Saturday, February 25

11:00 am - 12:00 noon Confessions
5:00 pm Mass
Knights of Columbus 4th Degree

Sunday, February 26

10:00 am Mass
12:00 pm Mass
1:00 pm - 5:00 pm Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
2:30 pm Marriage Preparation
7:00 pm Mass



Ladies of the parish are invited to the Catholic Women's League 'Book Club.' The book being reviewed is, "The Englishman's Boy." Please join them on February 21, 7:15 pm in Conf. Room C.

DID YOU KNOW? . . .

- Pro-Life Apologetics talk by Ruth Lobo-Shaw, from the Canadian Centre for Bioethical Reform, will take place February 21, 7:30 pm at Lakewood Civic Centre. Ruth will speak on, 'Lives on the Line: Modern Civil Rights and the Pre-Born Child.' Come and be informed. For more information, call Denise at 249-2764.
- 40 Hours For Life Saskatoon - February 22 (Ash Wednesday) to April 1 (Palm Sunday) - pray for an hour each day (4:30 pm-5:30 pm) for the protection of human life in front of City Hospital. Signs will be provided. We welcome the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's League, Catholic Christian Outreach, church, school and family groups to sign up for a particular day each week. Please call Denise, 249-2764 or email, campaignlifecoalitionsk@gmail.com the time (s) you choose. (dress warm).
- Bishop Donald Bolen will preside at the Rite of Election Celebration - the First Sunday of Lent, February 26, 3:00 pm at the Cathedral of the Holy Family Parish. The Diocesan Choir will provide the music leadership and the Diocesan Catholic Women's League will provide refreshments. Parishioners are welcome to come and support the Catechumens and Candidates. More information to follow.
- The Passion of the Earth: Nuclear Waste in Saskatchewan. A KAIROS Lenten Event in Solidarity with the Committee for Future Generations Saturday, March 3, 1:00 pm - 7:30 pm. See bulletin board for more information.
- Holy Cross High School presents *Les Miserables the School Edition*: a musical adaptation of the novel 'Les Miserables,' by Victor Hugo, March 21, 22 and 23, 7:00 pm. Call the Holy Cross High School Box Office . 659-8222 for tickets (\$8) beginning March 1.

CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE



President: Margaret Schwab,
374-4214

- Executive Meeting - Tuesday, February 28, 7:00 pm, Conference Room C.
- World Day of Prayer, Friday, March 2, 2:00 pm.

* 2012 CWL Memberships are available by contacting Marie Martens at 955-2036.
www.cwl.ca

WOMEN'S LENTEN RETREAT Join Father Geoffrey Young for a two part women's Lenten retreat. The first retreat will be held Saturday, March 3 and the second one will be held Saturday, March 31. The Retreats will begin at 8:00 am with a potluck breakfast, followed by Confessions, Mass and Holy Hour/Meditation and will conclude 11:30 am. *A wonderful way to begin Lent and to bring Lent to a close.*

MINISTRIES for February 25/26

Alter Servers

5:00 pm
10:00 am Kelly Wormsbecker team
12:00 pm Lucas Johner team
7:00 pm Antonio Moran team

No Children's Liturgy due to school holiday.

LEAVING A LEGACY

REMEMBERING YOUR CHURCH
By leaving a gift in your will or estate to Holy Spirit Parish, the impact will be felt and remembered for generations. For more information, please contact the parish office at 374-1425.



LENTEN LUNCHESES Holy Spirit parishioners are invited to join members of McClure United Church each Thursday during Lent (February 23-April 9) for a noon lunch and fellowship.

Following lunch, there will be a time of worship and reflection concluding at 1:00 pm. Lunch will cost \$9, paid at the door, or if you know how many you plan to attend, you may pay by cheque made out to McClure United Church.

As we need to know the number for lunch, please register with the church office (373-1753) before Tuesday noon of the week you plan to attend. Come to one or all the lunches.

ST. ANN'S HOME St. Ann's Senior Citizen's Village Will be holding its annual "Spring Gala" on Sunday, May 6 at the Sheraton-Cavalier, 12:00 noon - 2:30 pm. The Gala will consist of a Sunday brunch, wonderful entertainment, featuring the Eileen Laverty Trio, a live auction and door prizes. Mark your calendar and bring your friends to a very enjoyable event while at the same time supporting our Catholic senior's home. Tickets are \$50 for adults; \$15 for children 6-12; free for under age 6 - available at St. Ann's Home or by calling 374-8900, ext. 221.



PARKING LOT SPIRITUALITY

Kindness on the parish parking lot will be rewarded with 'valet' parking in heaven! Thank you for leaving available the designated handicap parking areas for those who need them. (If using the parking area it helps to display your blue handicap parking sign.) Remember, rumour has it that the exercise is even life-giving!



HOLY SPIRIT / McCLURE

UNITED CHURCH COVENANT

The Covenant, signed February 14, 2000, reflected the commitment of Holy Spirit and McClure United church parishioners to pray and work together for reconciliation and unity. Every year since, the communities have come together on many occasions for shared ecumenical initiatives. This has enabled parishioners of both congregations to grow in support of one another through the good ministry that is accomplished by working together. This weekend (February 19), Fr. Beck is the homilist at the McClure United Church services, 9:15 am and 11:00 am.

The following weekend, (February 25/26), as part of the Covenant, the parish of Holy Spirit welcomes Pastor Ron McConnell as the homilist at all our weekend liturgies. We also welcome the parishioners of McClure United church who gather with us in prayer.

"May we be faithful to this Covenant to the honour and glory of God." (from *A Covenant*, dated March 5, 2000, Holy Spirit/McClure United churches.)

Living Stewardship Now

Take a good look at what surpluses you are hanging on to. What is in closets or boxes you never open? Begin with one closet or one box at a time and divide the contents into what you need, what you can give away, and what you can put in the trash. Dispose appropriately. Then go on to the next one and do the same.

WELCOME to all visiting with us this weekend. Your faith and spirit enrich our community. May you travel safely and know that God's presence is always with you.



BIBLE STUDY/ SEASON OF LENT

Join us for bible study - 'Praying with Scripture'- during the season of Lent. The presentation and group participation will centre on what is known as 'Lectio Divina.'

Please call the parish office to register, 374-1425, (no fee) but it helps the office to prepare the handouts that will be used. New members are welcome. The program begins Thursday, March 1, 9:00 am - 11:00 am, Conference Room A/B.



YOUTH MINISTRY Movie Night

(Grades 7 and up)
Soul Surfer (PG)
Friday, March 23

More information at holyspiritsaskatoon.ca (youth news)

WE PLEDGE 5% . . . Weekday Food Hampers - Six days a week St. Mary's Parish takes food hampers to needy families that have applied for help (two hampers a day). These hampers provide families enough fresh food to last one or two days - fresh meat, potatoes, carrots, onions, fruit, eggs and milk. *"It helps their need only a little - but the gratitude we get from them shows that even the little help we can give is important."*

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER Holy Spirit Catholic Women's League is hosting World Day of Prayer on Friday, March 2, 2:00 pm. Everyone is welcome to join them in prayer on this day for justice in the world.



Starving for charity

Fast from food. Repent from your sins.

On Ash Wednesday we stand as sinners before God. We reflect on the misdeeds of our past and on the ill habits of our present. Our frail spirits wrestle with sin, even as our frail bodies fight off death. We accept ashes as a reminder of our mortality. We fast from food as a sign of our sorrow.

Our sins weigh us down, but it could be worse. You could have a plague of locusts darkening the sky over the place where you live. That happened once before. The prophet Joel addressed a people who were losing everything because they could not stop an advancing army of locusts. They believed God was punishing them for their sin, so they fasted as a sign of their repentance.

In our lives, sin does not bring locusts. But it brings other sorrows. Sin brings estrangement from the people we love, guilt when we lift our eyes to heaven, loss to a world starved for charity.

Can you imagine yourself living your life a better way? In the quiet of your heart, do you know what sin is darkening your sky? Are you willing to name it, specifically?

Accepts ashes. Fast from food. Repent.

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MISSION/MINISTRY TO BOLIVIA At our 10:00 am mass last weekend, Holy Spirit community extended a blessing to Kristin Wilde and Trevor Saunders as they prepared to join with a mission team representing CHALICE. CHALICE supports over 45,000 children and elderly in 15 countries. Kristen and Trevor have arrived in Lima, Peru to participate in CHALICE's 2012 Solidarity Tour. After spending a night at the Sisters of the Good Shepherd Retreat House, they visited the PINIFE mission site and engaged with the local people. Today they arrive at the CHALICE site of Yapaçani, Bolivia. For the next five days they will be meeting and working with the locals. They will be involved with housing projects, learning about local crafts, teaching English, and playing some sports. Please continue to pray for and support Kristin and Trevor and the solidarity team! Visit www.chalice.ca and follow their blog (www.jotobolivia.blogspot.com) for daily updates with photos and videos.

FIDES ET RATIO *Word Made Flesh, True Bread of Heaven - The mystery of the Liturgy and the Eucharist.* Father Barron explores the notion that "all value is summed up in the liturgy, the supreme act by which we commune with God." Considered by the Catholic Faith to be "the source and summit" of its identity and mission, the Eucharist is the central practice of the Church's culture. Sunday, February 26, 8:00 pm in the parish hall.

BREAKING DOWN DIVIDING WALLS:
What does Christian unity look like?
An exploration of foundational principles of Catholic commitment to ecumenism. Drawing from papal and consular sources as well as a number of contemporary ecumenical projects, this course will explore the vision of unity that provides the basis for all Catholic participation in the promotion of the ecumenical movement. Discussion of practical issues and proposals for church unity. Tuesdays, March 6 and 13 from 7:30-9:30pm at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish. Facilitated by Nick Jesson (diocesan ecumenical officer) in conjunction with the Roman Catholic Diocesan Foundations Program.



STATIONS OF THE CROSS Come and pray this Lenten devotional Wednesday evenings at 7:00 pm beginning Wednesday, February 29.

ECUMENICAL NEWS

McClure United Church and Holy Spirit parish, in accordance with their Covenant, yearly have study information evenings. This year we are pleased to have Sr. Teresita Kambeitz, OSU to facilitate two evenings on 'Forgiveness.'

The first session, 'Take Time to Forgive' will draw on scripture, stories and visuals to explore the five steps in the process of forgiveness and come to a deeper understanding of ourselves, others and God. In this session we will also outline five 'styles' of forgiveness. Monday, February 27, 7:00 pm at Holy Spirit Parish.

The second session is titled, 'Gladden My Heart, O Lord.' A common feeling in our adult years is a vague sense of regret for things done or not done in one's earlier life. This session will offer ways to deal with self-forgiveness and to experience "gladness of heart" (Psalm 86:4). Monday, March 26, 7:00 pm at Holy Spirit Parish. All are welcome.



PASTORAL ASSOCIATE Holy Spirit parish in Saskatoon is seeking a full time Pastoral Associate. Requirements include being an active Catholic involved in parish life; effective organizational and interpersonal skills; good listening, collaboration, and facilitation skills. The Pastoral Associate will be primarily responsible for sacramental preparation, school liaison and related ministry. Candidates interested in a part-time position are also invited to respond. Applications, accompanied by a resume and references can be submitted by March 22, 2012 to Holy Spirit Parish Search Committee, 114 Kingsmere Place, Saskatoon, SK S7J 3V7; (306) 374-1425; email hspirit@shaw.ca.

CONGRESS DAY WITH THE BISHOP Diocesan Congress Day will be held in three locations across the diocese - Saskatoon, February 25; Humboldt, March 10; and Kindersley, March 24.

Congress Day in Saskatoon will take place Saturday, February 25, 10:00 am to 3:30 pm at the Cathedral of the Holy Family (123 Nelson Road) - for Saskatoon City, Saskatoon Rural and Outlook deaneries and parishes. Register for the Saskatoon event before 5:00 pm Tuesday, February 21 by calling reception at the Catholic Pastoral Centre, 242-1500 or email reception@saskatoonrcdiocese.com. See Diocesan Bulletin for more details.

FOOD FOR THE POOR A food container is available at the church entrance to receive your gifts of non-perishable food. This food will be distributed to agencies in Saskatoon involved in helping to feed the poor. Why not try on a weekly basis to bring an item of food? It will be a great reminder of God's blessings and how we are called to bless others.



BLESSED PALM BRANCHES Originally, people paraded or processed in the original footsteps of Jesus from the little village of Bethany into the city of Jerusalem. As part of the festivities they carried real palm fronds or olive branches, the two most common trees in Palestine (see Matthew 21:18). These were replaced with local versions of "palms" as the celebration of Palm Sunday spread throughout Europe and then the entire world: willow branches, cedar branches, pussy willows, and flowers. The "palm branches" commonly used today are "ground palms" from various North American locations. Blessed palms have always been respected as holy objects or sacramentals. Some families place one or more on the wall behind a crucifix or holy picture, or they might braid them into crosses for wall decorations. Before the beginning of Lent the following year, blessed palms are burned at the local church and the ashes used in the Ash Wednesday ritual. You are invited to bring to the church any palm branches that you have at home. They will be burned and the blessed ashes will be used at all the Ash Wednesday liturgies at Holy Spirit parish. A basket is available in the Place of Welcome to gather the branches. New palm branches will be blessed and distributed at the Palm Sunday liturgies, March 31/April 1.

40 days to a new you

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES - *Divine Solitude*

Always remember to retire at various times into the solitude of your heart even while outwardly engaged in discussions or transactions with others. This mental solitude cannot be violated by the many people who surround you, since they are not standing around your heart but only around your body. Your heart remains alone in the presence of God.

Such was the exercise King David practiced amid his many occupations, and he testifies to it countless times in the psalms, as when he says, "O Lord, I am always with you;" "I see the Lord always before me;" "I have lifted my eyes to you, O my God, who dwells in heaven;" "My eyes are ever toward God." Indeed, our tasks are seldom so important as to keep us from withdrawing our hearts from them from time to time in order to retire into this divine solitude. (*Introduction to the Devout Life*).

Saint Francis de Sales (1567-1622) was bishop of Geneva and one of the originators of lay spirituality. M. Scott Peck



The Role of Godparents

To be chosen as a godparent is a special honour. You, above all others, have been entrusted with the responsibility to participate in this child's Christian life and education.

This privilege offers you the opportunity to develop a mutually enriching spiritual relationship - one that will last throughout this life and beyond.

There are many ways you can nurture this spiritual relationship and become a special friend to your godchild.

Among them are:

- Celebrate the anniversary of this holy day of baptism each year with a visit, call or a card.
- As your godchild grows, listen to and share in the struggles and triumphs of living a Christian life, and keep yourself informed on Christian doctrine and values, to be able to answer questions as they arise.
- Encourage a consistent life of faith through special cards, letters or gifts which celebrate holy events . . . Christmas, Easter . . . and personal growth events . . . graduation, first job, engagement. (Gift suggestions: a bible, spiritual book, rosary, religious jewelry, gift certificate for religious goods/books, retreat opportunity.)
- Participate in, or send assurance of prayer, as your godchild receives the other sacraments, particularly Confirmation and First Communion, which complete initiation into the church community.
- Be supportive of your godchild's parents in their role as the primary religious educators of their child.
- And most importantly, become a model of Christian living for your godchild, through daily prayer, virtue and active participation in parish life and liturgy.

By living a Christian life in partnership with your godchild, both of you will experience the great joy of sharing a life of faith. Congratulations and may God bless you!

THANK YOU Shirley Hyshka has served the parish of Holy Spirit for the past 3 1/2 years as a Pastoral Minister. She has been involved in many areas of sacramental ministry: sacramental preparation, Confirmation and First Communion; baptism preparation; visiting elementary schools; children's choir, scripture study organization and much more. Shirley has accepted a new position at St. Philip Neri parish and has begun organization and ministry development at St. Philip's. At the same time she will continue to lead the sacramental preparation of our young children this spring - January through May. As a parish community, we send her forth with God's blessing to this new challenge she has accepted and thank her for her ministry and service to our community. We have been blessed by her commitment to Holy Spirit parish. Thank you. *Fr. Ken Beck*



Why do we use ashes on Ash Wednesday?

Ashes are placed on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday, in one of the most counter-cultural acts of our faith. It is done for two reasons: a personal act of remembrance and as a sign or a witness for others.

The ashes come from the burnt Palms from last year's Passion Sunday celebration, which begins Holy Week. So, these ashes bring us back to our last celebration of the Passion, Death and resurrection of Jesus for us. On this first day of Lent, we begin a journey of renewal - from death to life.

This is a joyful season. We will make sacrifices, in order to try to let God reform our desiring, but this is a time for God to be generous to us.

When the ashes are placed on our foreheads, the minister says one of two formulas to help us remember who we are and the mission to which we are sent:

"Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return."

"Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel."

We are reminded that we are creatures and that our lives were given to us. But, we are also reminded that our lasting home is in eternity, with God. This is not our lasting home.

We are reminded that our call is to turn away from sin and to believe the Good News of our salvation in Jesus. This is a joyful reminder. It challenges us, for sure, but reminds us of why we want to turn from sin.

Finally, we wear our ashes as a sign. It is not a boastful sign through which I say, "Look at me and see how holy I am." No, it is much more like, "I'm willing to wear this sign in the world and say that I've been reminded of where I come from and where I am going. And, I've heard the call to turn away from a life of sin and give my life to living the Gospel of Jesus."

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment. Joel 2:12-1



Find a handy spot in your home to keep Take Five for Faith - maybe the kitchen table, posted on the refrigerator, or on your nightstand. Give yourself the gift of five uncluttered minutes a day to read the day's passage and then reflect and pray about what you have just read. Take an

extra copy for a homebound neighbor or friend. They'll be glad you did!

February 20

Pass along a peace of advice

Peace activities aren't born; they are inspired by others. Longtime Catholic peace worker Kathy Kelly was introduced to the writings of Daniel Berrigan, SJ and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. while a student at a Catholic school during the turbulent 1960s. "The St. Paul faculty," she says, "gently but consistently showed us hero-figures who had tried to confront injustice and cruelty and who believed in love of enemy as well as love of neighbour." Let's make sure children are exposed to more than comic-book action superheroes. Let's introduce them to the real heroes, those who have worked tirelessly for peace and justice.

Readings: James 3:12-18; Mark 9:14-29
"The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace."

February 21

FEAST OF PETER DAMIAN, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH; MARDI GRAS

Get ready to get ready

Preparation is crucial for a meaningful celebration. Advent prepares us for Christmas, Lent prepares us for Easter, and Mardi Gras prepares us for Lent. These alternating seasons of quiet and celebration help us notice and appreciate the fact that God is found not only in austerity and prayer but also in music and celebration. As a result, we experience the sustaining presence of God in every aspect of our lives. A good Mardi Gras will help us have a good Lent. A good Lent, in turn, ensures a spiritually rich Easter, which is the ultimate goal. So go ahead and celebrate Mardi Gras today! Decorate your home, gather with friends, enjoy some good food. Tomorrow you enter the desert.

Readings: James 4:1-10; Mark 9:30-37
"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

February 22

ASH WEDNESDAY; DAY OF FASTING AND ABSTINENCE

Be creative this Lent

Is it Lent already? Yes, which means another season of opportunity to grow in faith. Consider how you might wisely spend the next 40 days by focusing on one thing in your life that needs to change. Try a new spin on the traditional practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Prayer can be engaged in many ways: with words, silence, contemplation of icons - or walking a labyrinth or the

Readings: Joel 2:12-18; 1 Corinthians 5:20-6:2
"Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart."

Stations of the Cross for the spiritually fidgety. You can "fast" from more than food: Give up media distractions or idle gossip. Alms can be paid out in other than dollar bills: Offer your time to the lonely, your love to a child.

February 23

FEAST OF POLYCARP, BISHOP, MARTYR

Bring it on

You have to admire the early Christian martyrs, not only for their courage but also for the defiance, even confidence, with which they faced dying for their faith. The bishop Saint Polycarp had been a Christian his whole life, but for some reason the Romans waited until he was 86 - an unheard-of age in the ancient world - to hunt him down. He refused to flee, and when hauled before a Roman official engaged him in lively debate. When threatened with burning at the stake, his eventual fate, he retorted that while the fires of martyrdom last only for a while, the fires of judgment never go out. Polycarp and other martyrs offer the example of those who reckoned their eternal fate more important than their earthly one.

Readings: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25
"If . . . you turn away your hearts and will not listen . . . I tell you now that you will certainly perish."

February 24

"I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life.

Life is a series of choices and decisions. Some of those decisions are routine: what to eat, what to wear, how to get everything done that needs to be done. Other decisions far more significant: career and vocational choices, the choice to marry or to become parents. At that level, the choices we make reflect our priorities. Much as we may like to think it does, the bible does not give many hard and fast answers to the struggles we face. From the very beginning in Genesis, scripture emphasizes human freedom. God wants us to live in covenant with God and with each other. But God won't force us. The choice is always ours. *Holy God, strengthen us to hear your word and choose your way.*

Readings: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25
"I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life."

February 25

This is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke, setting free the oppressed . . . sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless, clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.

In his role as prophet, Isaiah confronts the people of Israel about their worship practices and their faithfulness to the covenant with God. Like James, Isaiah reminds us that our religious activities that are done just for show don't impress anyone, especially God. God desires steadfast love rather than meaningless sacrifices. God requires justice, mercy and humility. *You challenge us to make our faith visible and genuine, eternal God.*

Readings: Isaiah 58:1-9a; Matthew 9:14-15