

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This past Wednesday was Ash Wednesday. It marked the beginning of the Season of Lent. On Ash Wednesday, the Church distributed ashes calling to mind that we are to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel, and, we are dust and onto dust we shall return. Lent, therefore is an opportunity to be transformed in the Lord.

Lent, the solemn 40-day period before Easter, holds profound significance in the Catholic Church and other Christian traditions. Starting on Ash Wednesday and concluding on Holy Thursday, it is a season of penitence and preparation, and throughout Lent, we are asked to engage ourselves in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These practices serve to deepen our connection with God, our awareness of Jesus' sacrificial love, and to prepare our hearts and minds for the Paschal Mystery—the journey of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. Lent is an invitation to reflect, repent, and renew one's commitment to living a life of faith, ultimately leading to the joyful celebration of Easter. In this Season, we move from the green of Ordinary Time to the purple of the Season of Lent. This color for Lent holds significant symbolism. While purple serves as a reminder of Christ's suffering and sacrifice, it is also associated with royalty, signifying Jesus as our eternal King.

There are many ways to live our Catholic faith during the Lenten season! Many people make personal sacrifices and give something up for the entire forty-day period, symbolizing self-discipline and reliance on God's grace. Some engage in acts of service to emulate Jesus' love and compassion towards others. And there are many practices and traditions that take place in faith communities like our own such as The Stations of the Cross. The Stations, also known as The Way of the Cross, is a revered tradition where Catholics pray and reflect on fourteen different moments leading up to Jesus' death. These fourteen moments begin with Jesus being condemned to death and end with the body of Jesus being placed in the tomb. Many presentations of the Stations of the Cross add yet a fifteenth moment, the Resurrection. So, throughout these forty days, I invite us to pray the Stations of the Cross whether as a community every Friday of Lent or privately at your convenience. These practices encourage our spiritual growth, the deepening of our faith, and the preparation of our hearts for the celebration of Easter.

Throughout the Forty Days of Lent, we look forward to the Celebration of Easter, The Celebration of The Resurrection of the Lord. We look forward to the Celebration Jesus' triumph over death.

Use these days to prepare yourselves. Enter into the spirit of the Lenten Season so that the richness of The Celebration of Easter can have deepened meaning for each of us.

-Fr. Raphael