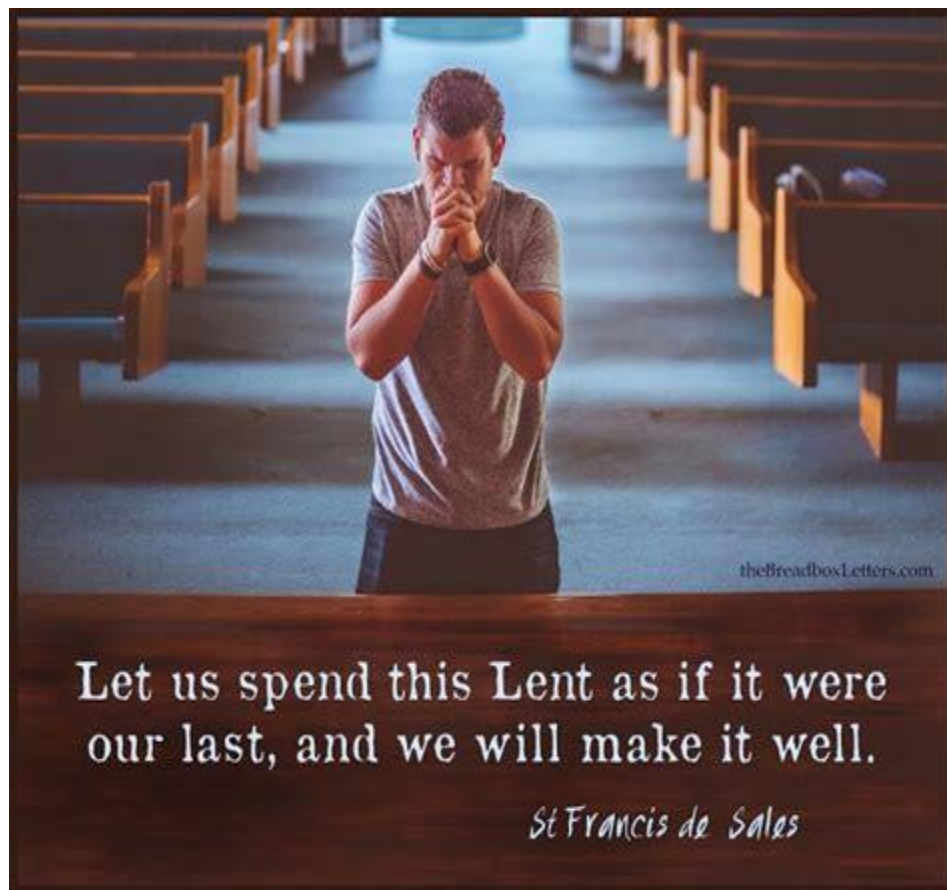


FROM FATHER JOHN: " You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, say to the LORD, 'My refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust.' No evil shall befall you, nor shall affliction come near your tent, For to his angels he has given command about you, that they guard you in all your ways. Upon their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the asp and the viper; you shall trample down the lion and the dragon. Because he clings to me, I will deliver him; I will set him on high because he acknowledges my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in distress; I will deliver him and glorify him." ~ Psalm 91

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.



Let us spend this Lent as if it were
our last, and we will make it well.

St Francis de Sales

As we enter into the Season of Lent, on this First Sunday of Lent, we realize that Lent is a gift from God that gives us the opportunity to receive spiritual renewal, conversion and growth. Growing in our relationship with our Lord Jesus, and one another, is a lifelong endeavor for Christians and Lent is a key moment in this endeavor.

I want to share with you Bishop Hicks column for the month of March which is entitled *Lenten Madness*. In it our Bishop exhorts us to enter into Lent in such a way that we obtain a fervent, passionate and enthusiastic Lent. The promise that God makes to us when commit to celebrating Lent in a fervent, passionate and enthusiastic way is that it will lead us, and our families, to many graces and blessings.

The following is Bishop Hick's monthly column for March:

"In 1908, the Illinois High School Association sponsored a small invitational basketball tournament that quickly grew to a statewide event due to its popularity. As years went on, this tournament consistently sold out the University of Illinois gymnasium in Urbana-Champaign and was commonly referred to as 'March Madness.' This term of endearment is also used to promote the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball tournament.

The word 'madness' has many connotations and definitions. In this case, 'madness' refers to the fervor, passion and enthusiasm that accompanies the tournament. Using that definition, let's imagine what it would be like if we were to approach the 40 days before Easter as 'Lenten Madness.' Just think of a fervent, passionate and enthusiastic Lent.

We have become accustomed during 'March Madness' to see and read feature stories about Sister Jean, BVM. She is the legendary chaplain of the Loyola Ramblers men's basketball team. Even though she loves the sport of basketball and supporting her team, never doubt her true passion. Anyone who knows her, knows that her deepest love is being a servant of God and devoting her life to helping others.

On February 24, our Holy Father released a beautiful message for Lent 2022. I invite you to read and reflect on the pope's powerful words as a way of preparing for this holy season: www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/20211111-messaggio-quaresima2022.html

In his Lenten message, Pope Francis reflects on St. Paul's exhortation to the Galatians: 'Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all.' (Gal: 6:9-10) You can almost hear St. Paul delivering those words of encouragement to the Galatians, like a basketball coach animating his or her team during halftime. Basically, St. Paul is inspiring those followers of Christ to not lose heart, to not grow weary or apathetic. Instead, they should be on fire for all the ways they can do good in the name of the Lord. Go out there and give it your all!

The messages of St. Paul and the Holy Father on perseverance and persistence are so relevant to keeping the flame of faith and salvation alive in the minds, hearts and souls of Christ's followers. In this time of extended pandemic and constant bad-news cycles, we are in need of God's burning love, mercy, compassion, healing, hope, joy and peace more than ever. We are encouraged not only to personally embrace this relationship with the Lord, but also to share it with others with our words, attitudes and actions.

The pope also reminds us that if we do not give up, if we stay in the game, then victory is ours. That victory certainly looks different from winning the NCAA tournament. As missionary disciples, our victory is sharing in the life and salvation that was won through Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. The Holy Father reminds us to never take our eyes off the prize. 'If we do not give up, we shall reap our harvest in due time and that, with the gift of perseverance, we shall obtain what was promised, for our salvation and the salvation of others. By cultivating fraternal love towards everyone, we are united to Christ, who gave his life for our sake, and we are granted a foretaste of the joy of the kingdom of heaven, when God will be 'all in all.' (Pope Francis, Lenten Message 2022, Section 3)

Lent is a time that we are invited to grow closer to the Lord with our acts of penance, prayer and almsgiving. It is all too easy to approach this sacred time with a status quo mentality or lackluster energy. We might say, 'I will give up this' or 'I will do that.' But then we may neglect to back it up with the needed fervor, passion and enthusiasm. This year, however, I invite you, within the life of the Church, to get off the bench and back into the game. Let's strive to make this a time of renewal and conversion that leads us deeper into our love of God

and neighbor. In other words, let's make this blessed season a time of 'Lenten Madness.'"

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.

