

A NOTE FROM FATHER PHIL



Today is Valentine's Day. Well, at least it used to be. Now it is the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius, brothers who were missionaries in the Slavic countries. It's been 52 years since that change, yet Cyril and Methodius' cards have not caught on, and tufuhije has not replaced chocolate. So, Valentine's Day still reigns, new Catholic calendar or no new Catholic calendar.

Because we know virtually nothing about Saint Valentine or how his old feast day became associated with cards, flowers, candy, and gifts is a bit of a mystery. Personally, I think that Hallmark, Godiva and FTD Floral had something to do with it, but some experts who know more than I do trace it back to Chaucer who suggested that birds chose their mates on this day. Right. Other scholarly elites claim that Christians simply blessed a pagan Roman feast that was celebrated by boys drawing the names of girls whom they would date that year. That seems more plausible, after all, we Christians did the same thing when we chose a date to celebrate Christmas. No matter, Valentine's Day is not for scholars; the day is for lovers. Enjoy and indulge.

Celebrate now because this Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. Already! Which is fine with me. I like an early Lent because when the holy season begins it seems like spring cannot be far behind.

This year the Distribution of the Ashes will be just a little different. It's a COVID thing. First, the phrase "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" or "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return" will not be said as each recipient is signed with ashes, but rather proclaimed only once in a general way at the beginning. When recipients come forward they may either receive the ashes on the forehead as is customary in English speaking countries, or they may opt for the Roman way of doing things by bowing their head and allowing the distributor to sprinkle some ashes on their head. There is little chance that the virus can be spread by a brief touch to the forehead, but this no touch option is available for those who want to be extra cautious.

Masses on Ash Wednesday will be celebrated at 7:00 am, Noon, and 7:00 pm.

Lent is a time for prayer, fasting and charitable works. However, our primary focus is not on these practices, but rather on the goal of Lent which is to realize more deeply our communion with God. Lent makes us better people. Prayer—lifting up our hearts and minds to God—makes us more conscious of God's presence and more conscious of what is really weighing on our hearts and minds and not what we wish we were feeling and thinking. It makes us more aware of our shortcomings and sins, which is also a good thing, because acknowledging our faults is the first step to correcting them. Fasting—giving up a good for a greater good—makes us more conscious of people who may be hungry and wanting, not because they have chosen to be, but because of injustice and poverty. Fasting helps us determine what we need and what we don't. What we must keep and what we can giveaway or do without. Charity blesses people with the blessings God has given us.

In determining your own Lenten practice remember the three disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and do not forget the goal: a deeper awareness of our communion with God!

And speaking of Valentine's Day and Lent, I loved Lisa Driscoll's fine work as Music Director and I am saddened that we will be experiencing a communal fast by doing without her dedication and fine work. Blessings upon her during this Holy Season and always. Thank you, Lisa!