OUR LADY OF PROVIDENCE CHAPEL

SAINT VINCENT HOSPITAL
WORCESTER MEDICAL CENTER

March 5, 2025

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Weekday Masses: (Monday-Friday) at 12 noon
Weekend Masses: Saturday, 4:00pm — Sunday: 7:30am & 4:00pm
Holyday Mass Schedule: afternoon prior at 4:00pm
Holyday proper at 12 noon and 4:00pm
Confessions: First Saturday of every month at 3:30pm
Department Telephone: 508.363.6246
Website: www.ourladyofprovidence.net

THE SPIRITUAL FOCUS OF LENT

According to the *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar*, the holy season of Lent "disposes both catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery: catechumens, through the several stages of Christian initiation; the faithful, through reminders of their own baptism and through penitential practices" (*GNLYC*, n. 27). The focus of Lent, then, should be on traditional penitential practices (viz. prayer, almsgiving and fasting) which prepare for renewing your baptismal innocence on Easter by rejecting sin and deepening our union with Christ. The expression *Paschal mystery* is the summary term used to describe Christ's work of redemption, which was primarily accomplished through the Lord's passion, death, resurrection and His Ascension back to the right hand of God. It is through baptism that believers participate in that mystery — dying to sin and rising to life!

The Paschal Mystery

Around the year 56AD, during the season of Passover, Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians this simple statement of faith, "Christ, our Passover has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5,7). Thus, Paul sought to interpret Christ's death by means of the Passover metaphor. As time developed, the term paschal mystery became the preferred way of speaking about what God had done in Christ. The Jewish Passover lasted fifty days—a week of weeks, culminating in the fiftieth day or Jewish Pentecost. Even now, Passover celebrates Israel's going forth (or exodus) from Egypt and God's effecting the covenant with His Chosen People at Mount Sinai. Our English words paschal and mystery come from the original Greek of the New Testament. The adjective paschal comes from the Greek word for Passover and *pascha* was newly-coined by the 3rd century B.C. translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (viz. Septuagint or LXX) because neither classical nor contemporary Greek of that period had any word equivalent to the Hebrew *pesach*—the foundational event in the life of the Israelites. Pesach is a journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land that began when the angel of death "passed over" the houses of the Israelites that had been marked with the blood of the lamb, which saved them from death. The noun mystery was associated with the worldview of Platonism, long before NT writers used it to describe what God was doing in Christ. In Platonic thought, sensible (or concrete) realities participate in and point toward heavenly realities; thus, contemplation was necessary for the created order to be properly understood. Eventually, such a symbolic understanding was extended to the spiritual interpretation of historical events—thus, chronologically prior events were understood either as a preparation for or as a foreshadowing of future events. In the second century, St. Melito of Sardis wrote *Concerning the Passover* and, yet, while not actually using the term paschal mystery, the Bishop of Sardis rejoiced that Christ was the fulfillment of the earlier redemptive acts of God. His principal interest was to deepen the Christian understanding of the Book of Exodus—promise awaiting fulfillment. Melito began by saying, "the sacrifice of the Lamb, and the celebration of the Pasch, and the letter of the Law, have been fulfilled in Christ." This use of the imagery of the Jewish Passover yielded a paschal understanding of the faith that we must place in Christ—His death leads to our life; His humanity makes possible our divinity.

LENTEN DISCIPLINES: PRAYER, ALMSGIVING AND FASTING

In Regard to Prayer

St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) considered prayer to be "a surge of the heart; it is a simple look toward heaven; it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy" (*CCC*, n. 2558). While it can take many forms, prayer can primarily be understood as a petition that is made to God because, as creatures, we are totally dependent upon Him. We beseech God for help in a variety of particular situations or for a special need. While God certainly listens to our prayers, He remains free to respond to the petition or not. The early Church adopted the Jewish custom of audible, public prayers accompanied by the use of gestures, so that the Lord's Prayer often served as the common thread of public prayer. In the ensuing centuries, prayer became more than vocal and public, it also became private and interior. This type of prayer was seen as the means by which an individual developed spiritually, from a mere beginner, through affective prayer, reaching a level of intimacy with God that is considered unitive. From pre-Christian times even to our own day, what constitutes a legitimate request for any prayerful petition to God has been the source of lively debate. Saint Augustine believed that it was proper to pray for whatever "can be lawfully desired." Another issue in regard to the object of our prayers is derived from the nature of God Himself—because God is omniscient, He knows our needs even before we ask His help. Saint Thomas Aquinas wrestled with the apparent conflict between divine knowledge and our asking. He concluded that prayer does not force God to do something that He has not already willed. To pray is to submit our human needs and desires to God. The intention needed is to cooperate with God in bringing about what He has decreed. There you have a certain attitude that we have to bring to every prayerful act and that is to fix our thoughts and minds on God alone. So, in the East, at least, this requirement for intense concentration led to the development

and repetition of short, intense formulæ for prayer that included the name of Jesus. Eventually, these demands coalesced into the Byzantine *prayer of the heart* and the best known example is the *Jesus Prayer*: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." Those formulaic words, along with clearing the mind of all distractions, were thought to lead to the discovery of the Spirit—when that point is reached, merely human prayer becomes united with the prayer of the Spirit. Initially, in Western Christianity, the practice of short, intense prayer also prevailed; however, during the High Middle Ages, longer periods of prayer came into vogue. Prayer became increasingly understood as our seeking after God and, thus, it came to be seen as a desire for the divine. As these practices took hold, differences between prayers of meditation and acts of contemplation became blurred and, so, various kinds of prayer emerged: discursive, affective, and contemplative styles of praying were identified. Moreover, a developmental notion of prayer classified stages in the deepening process of the spiritual life. The focus of petitionary prayer was also augmented by words of divine praise and acts of thanksgiving to God. As the concept of prayer became more and more intricate, various methods developed, e.g., the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. The Catholic tradition has always placed great emphasis on intercessory prayer—our prayers are also directed to the Virgin Mary and/or to the angels and saints. Prayer to the saints differs from the words that we address directly to God. God alone warrants our worship and adoration, which is the equivalent of the Greek term *latreia* (Gk. Λατρεία). Veneration of the saints is considered *dulia* (a Latinized form of Greek δουλεία or service). *Hyperdulia* is accorded to the Virgin Mary and to her alone, due to her singular grace-filled life.

Almsgiving or Acts of Mercy

In the encyclical *Dives in misericordia*, especially in Appendix A, Saint Pope John Paul II sought to deepen the Church's understanding of *misericordia*. Our English word mercy (Lat. *misericordia*) inadequately conveys the true biblical depth of that notion. In the Old Testament, the two Hebrew words *hesed* (or steadfast love) and *rahamim* constitute mercy's biblical foundations. *Hesed* entails that a profound attitude of goodness must prevail in any given situation, so, if that attitude exists between two people, then the two become faithful to each another. When steadfast love or *hesed* is used to refer God, it is only used in reference to God's original covenant with Israel—the supreme sign of Yahweh's overflowing generosity and grace. Eventually, *hesed* acquired a juridical quality, when Israel broke the covenant and God's legal obligation to the Chosen People technically ceased with those infidelities. Yet, therein, the divine form of *hesed* revealed its deeper qualities—a generous love that always remains so, as a divine love that is more powerful than repeated infidelity, and as an unearned grace that is stronger than sin. The second Hebrew word used for mercy is *rahamim (*or womb-love) that serves to illustrate the love of a mother and also describes the unique bond (viz. the particular love) between the woman who is with child and the child in her womb. Such maternal love exists without merit and, as truly heart-felt, *rahamim* gives rise to both moral goodness and maternal tenderness, not to mention it also creates patience and understanding. These are all the prerequisites which are essential for someone or anyone to become eager to forgive. Within the writings of the New Testament, the Greek word *eleos* is the term that those sacred authors used for mercy and, as a result, *eleos* (lit. "oil that is poured out") can be understood as implying loving kindness or divine compassion. One form of the Penitential Rite is the use of the Greek *Kyrie eleison* and *Christe eleison*. In preparation for offering God true worship, the Church begs the Lord to pour out His merciful love, like holy oil from above, on those assembled before the altar of sacrifice. Within the Catholic liturgical tradition, the key word for mercy is *misericordia*, which literally means a "wretched heart." As a true virtue, *misericordia* entails a heart-felt reaction to another individual's suffering coupled with a willingness to do whatever is necessary to help relieve the cause of their pain or suffering. The contemporary understanding of *mercy as pity* differs sharply from the divine or biblical version. In modern usage, mercy has an air of condescension, whereas mercy's divine form that we should have is a powerful feeling, welling up from inner attitudes of tenderness and love, such that mercy is akin to a wretched heart that aches for the suffering that has prompted that reaction in the first place. This gut-wrenching sensation is the impetus for concrete action to relieve and heal whatever has precipitated another's suffering—the Lord's mercy is like that and, of course, even deeper and much more profound.

Memento Mori

The ashes imposed on the foreheads of the faithful on Ash Wednesday symbolize death, repentance, and as a reminder of mortality. Those ashes also represent grief over sin and signify our dependence on God. The discipline of memento mori has a long history. The expression literally means *remember* (a command) plus *to die* (an infinitive) that is rendered as "remember that you, the onlooker, will die." This is a pithy restatement of the words that the priest uses when he imposes ashes on the foreheads of the people, "Remember you are dust and unto dust you shall return." While this opening day of Lent causes the faithful to reflect on the inescapable reality of death, yet it is also a day that looks ahead to Christ's death for us, in which all our sins have been taken up and over-

UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF FASTING

Introduction

In the Apostolic Constitution *Paenitemini,* Pope Paul VI significantly altered the formerly strict Lenten fast and reorganized the rules governing penitence. The Pope reaffirmed that "Lent preserves its penitential character" and that Ash Wednesday and all the Fridays of Lent are to be observed as days of penitence. The manner in which penitence must be observed on such days by abstaining from meat on all the Fridays of Lent and by "abstinence and fast...on Ash Wednesday…the first day of "Grande Quaresima" (Great Lent) and on Good Friday" (*Paenitemini*, Ch. III). The practice of fasting is a common practice in a variety of religions. Whenever we fast, it must be placed within its biblical framework: Fasting is both the prelude and the means to a deeper spiritual life for those who engage in it. Thomas Langan, in his book *The Catholic Tradition*, wrote, "….medieval man enjoyed an understanding [that] for the material order to be disciplined by the higher order of the spirit, the body becoming forced to submit to the intellectual will. Hence the emphasis on fasting and penance, practices of ascesis, in order to control the unruly passions that tend to bog down in the nearest materially desirable object, and to order the will by building up strong habits ("virtues") enlightened by the Word of God, to fulfill the Lord's mission" (p. 187).

Understanding the Meaning of Fasting

Broadly understood, fasting is willingly refraining from enjoying something that is known to be good. In ordinary use, to fast can be *partial*, which means to restrict the amount or kind of food that is eaten or fasting can be *complete* or a total fast. Though fasting appears to be a physical act, in fact, it is meant to really be a spiritual undertaking. Saint Thomas Aquinas ascribed a three-fold purpose to any fast: (1) fasting tames our desires; (2) fasting enhances the mind's ability to contemplate divine or spiritual realities; and (3) it is an act that serves as satisfaction for our sinfulness. While Pope, Benedict XVI encouraged the faithful to not simply fast out of selfish reasons, but to see fasting as an act linked to the benefit of others. The Pope Emeritus envisioned fasting as *spiritual armor* that "mortifies our selfishness and makes us sympathetic to those who have little." Pope Benedict added this, "In our own day, fasting seems to have lost something of its spiritual meaning, and has taken on, in a culture characterized by the search for material well-being, a therapeutic value for the care of one's body. Fasting certainly bring benefits to physical well-being, but for believers, it is, in the first place, a 'therapy' to heal all that prevents them from conformity to the will of God."

LENTEN RULES FOR FASTING & ABSTINENCE

Abstinence from Eating Meat

All Catholics, 14 years or older, must abstain from meat (beast or fowl) on all the Fridays of Lent and on Ash Wednesday. This does not prohibit the use of *laticineria* (viz. eggs or milk products) nor condiments, even if they are made from animal fat.

Fasting

Fasting is required for Catholics between18 years of age and who are not yet observed their59th birthday. Those who are subject to the obligation to fast may take only one full meal. While two smaller meals (or collations) are allowed to maintain strength and according to particular circumstances, these two collations should not equal one full meal. On fast days, eating solid foods between meals is not permitted. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are the only two fast days required; though fasting is encouraged throughout Lent.

Paschal Fast Includes Abstinence

The paschal fast should be observed on Good Friday. According to the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, "The Paschal Fast must be kept sacred. It should be celebrated everywhere on Good Friday, and where possible should be prolonged throughout Holy Saturday (*SC*, n. 110). Since Lent officially ends on Holy Thursday, this is no longer a Lenten fast after the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper; no, this is a fast of anticipation—the most ancient act of fasting known to the Church. It is highly recommended to extend the paschal fast until the Easter Vigil. Regardless of the nature or duration of fasting, restricting what we eat, when we eat and how much is eaten should be seen as the minimal response to the Lord's call to live this Lenten season as a time of penance and conversion.

Conclusion

Lent is the ideal time for interior repentance—the radical re-orienting of our lives to God and a turning away from sin. Repentance entails a degree of spiritual affliction. Interior penance is expressed externally by prayer, almsgiving and fasting. It is a time for a more frequent examination of conscience, increased acts of devotion (e.g., attending daily Mass), self-denial that lead to forgiveness of sins and Easter joy!