

## First Sunday of Lent



News You Can Use...from Fr. Steve

### The Academy Awards and Lent

OK. So I admit it, I'm a fan of the Academy Awards ceremony. This past one, the 81<sup>st</sup>, they came up with a new and I thought effective way to honor the five actors/actresses who were nominated in the various categories. Five former Academy Award winners in each of the categories spoke favorably and insightfully about the performances. The commentary always focused on the quality and integrity and authenticity of the performer as an example of the highest example of the acting craft. In other words, these nominees were the opposite of people "going through motions." They just didn't show up on the set, they took the role to heart and gave themselves to it. They were worthy of an academy award honor.

I believe there is a similar dynamic going on in our own lives. Whenever we see someone "going through the motions" in life or in love, it's a pretty sad sight. Anybody, whether a sports figure, musician or vocalist, a teacher or doctor or researcher, or even a cash register check-out person, who merely goes through the motions of their particular job of responsibility entrusted to them, is a sad sight.

Perhaps some of you or other members of your family or your friends have been "**going through the motions**" in life or relationships, giving a shallow performance of caring and giving. Stress, excessive busyness, anxiety, fear, and self preoccupation are all factors that cause someone to go through the motions in a family or a marriage or a friendship. If a close friend, classmate, or trusted colleague chooses to go through the motions of interacting with you, you can always tell when it is superficial. When your friend doesn't have his or her heart in a relationship, then that person is missing your heart.

It shouldn't be a big surprise, then, that such a thing could happen to us in our spiritual lives. Isn't this precisely what Jesus so often has cautioned against in the Scriptures? Avoid going through the motions when you pray, or give alms or do penance. If your heart isn't in it, then such acts of penance and self denial won't be a loving act, but an empty one, without purpose. This is a very important self reflection when it comes to our Lenten journey. When we accepted the ashen cross on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday and promised to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel, we intended that external action to be grounded in an interior attitude of the heart toward God and our love relationship with God.

"Turning away" and "being faithful" are the two great movements of our spiritual life and our love life. In every love relationship, there are things that we do that can compromise and damage our loving - we need to turn away from those things. Likewise there are many things, sometimes little things that can nourish and vitalize a love relationship. We need to be faithful to those things. Turning away and being faithful are what love looks like and feels like in the real world. If all you are prepared to do, or all you desire to do is just "go through the motions," if you regard Ash Wednesday as simply a day to get ashes on your forehead, and not struggle with the demands of conversion of the heart, then when ashes are offered, better for you to stay in your seat.

**Repent, and believe in the Gospel.** Mark 1:15

### This Week at St. AJ

#### Saturday, February 28

4:00PM Confessions

5:30PM Vigil Mass *People of the Parish*

#### Sunday, March 1

#### First Sunday of Lent

10:00AM Mass *God's Blessings on Amy's Mom*

11:30AM Mass *Theresa Kazarnowicz*

5:00PM Mass *Intentions of Students of our area Universities*

10:00PM Mass *John Williamson, Jr.*

#### Wednesday, March 4

12:05PM Mass *Margaret Donohue*

12:30PM to 2:00PM Church will be open today.

7:30PM Scripture Study Group – Penn Newman Center

#### Friday, March 6

1:00PM Mass *St. AJ Perpetual Memorial Society*

5:15PM Stations of the Cross *All are welcome.*

#### Saturday, March 7

5:30PM Vigil Mass *People of the Parish*

### **FAST AND ABSTINENCE AND OTHER LENTEN OPPORTUNITIES**

The Bishops of the United States prescribe as minimal obligations that all persons who are fourteen years of age and older are bound to abstain from eating meat on all the Fridays of Lent and Good Friday. All persons eighteen years of age and older, up to and including their fifty-ninth birthday, are bound to fast by limiting themselves to a single full meal on Good Friday. All the faithful are encouraged, when possible, to participate daily at Mass and receive the Holy Eucharist and to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

#### **Stations of the Cross – in Church**

The traditional devotion of Stations of the Cross will be celebrated on the Fridays of Lent at 5:15 pm in Church.

#### **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

This Sacrament is at the heart of Lent: forgiveness – purification – starting over. Hopefully, your Lenten journey will include your celebration of this Sacrament.

#### **Lenten Button**

Our Lenten Button is a poignant symbol of our on-going Lenten journey and an external witness to others of our Catholic identity and our membership in St. AJ parish. Please wear it proudly. The buttons will be available in the rear of Church as long as supplies last.

#### **Stewardship**

A good time to put your gifts of time, talent, and treasure at the service of your Parish.

#### **Lenten Scripture Study Sharing Group**

If you are looking for a special spiritual opportunity this coming Lent, consider the Scripture Study Sharing Group meeting weekly on Wednesdays of Lent, starting this week on March 4. The Group will spend a comfortable, fruitful hour reflecting on and faith-sharing on Scripture readings of the up-coming Sunday, particularly their impact on our personal lives as Christians. The Group is open to all, students and parishioners, and will meet in the Penn Newman Center from 7:30 to 8:30 pm. The session will conclude with the Church's Liturgy of the Hours Office of Night Prayer.

#### **Collection for Central & Eastern European Church**

Please participate in this essential Collection this weekend. Your donations help support seminaries, social service programs, youth ministry, pastoral centers, schools and the spreading of the Gospel message through the mass media.