

Lent 1- Friday

St. Andrew's School

23 February 2018

Dear Father Gomes, Father Joseph; dear teachers and staff and students of St. Andrew's School:

Introduction

This morning it is a real joy for me to be with all of you. I am visiting your parish in these days, and your pastor kindly asked me to celebrate this Holy Mass for the school community. As you know, your school is a very important part of St. Andrew's Parish, and so it is fitting that I spend some time with you. Later this afternoon, I will have the opportunity of visiting with your very fine teachers who are so dedicated to you. The St. Andrew's family is proud of its school, as am I.

Season of Lent

From the purple vestments the priests are wearing and from the purple curtain behind the altar, you can see that the Church is celebrating a special time of year. This is the season of Lent, which began on Ash Wednesday when you were marked on your forehead with ashes in the form of a cross. By receiving these ashes you accepted that you wanted to follow Jesus more closely, and to leave behind the faults and failings that hurt your friendship with him.

Following what Jesus told us to do, during Lent the Church asks us to do three things: to pray, to fast and to give alms. What does this mean for you?

First, it means that you should pray more. Talk to Jesus out loud in prayers you learned or, even more importantly, talk to him in your heart – just by thinking about him. But prayer is not just talking. Like any conversation with a friend, it also means listening. And to listen you must be quiet. That’s hard these days when there is so much noise. But I urge you to find a little quiet time every day to hear his gentle voice. Give him the attention you would give to any good friend.

Second, adults are to fast on certain days in Lent and encouraged to do so on others. Young people don’t have to do this. But you can “give up” something for Lent as a sacrifice. When we give up something freely, it is a way of reminding ourselves of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Because he loves us, he gave up his life on the Cross. Our little sacrifices are a way we can say “thank you” to Jesus. And if we give up something that costs money, we can put that money aside to help others.

Lastly, the Church tells us that during Lent we should “give alms.” That’s a way of saying that we should help those who are in need. There are many ways to do this. Sometimes we give money, as you do for the Holy Childhood, helping poor children around the world. Other times, to give alms can mean giving our time to help out more at home; it can also mean to help a fellow student who is having trouble with their school work.

If you practice these things during Lent, you will acquire good

habits. And, you will be ready to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus at Easter with more meaning.

Gospel

Today's Gospel comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Like Moses who went up on Mount Sinai to receive the Law from God, Jesus goes up a mountain to give a New Law to his disciples. He can do this because he is the Son of God, far more important than Moses.

In some ways, this New Law might seem even harder to keep than the one Moses received. For example, in the Old Law it was forbidden to kill. But Jesus adds something more. We are not even to be angry with others!

One of the hardest sayings of Jesus' teaching in this Sermon is what he says about when we come to offer our gifts at the altar – we could say when we come to Mass and are going to receive Holy Communion. Not only should we forgive those who have offended us but we should also think if someone has something against us. Do you know someone who is angry at you or doesn't like you or ignores you? If that's the case, then you can't just wait for them to ask forgiveness. You have to take the first step. You have to go to them and try to be "reconciled" with that person. Sometimes this is very hard to do.

What Jesus asks of us as his friends is that we follow in his footsteps, that we follow his example of what it means to be a good

person. But he doesn't just tell us what to do, he also gives us the helps we need. Besides his word which the Church has preserved in the Bible, Jesus gives us the Sacraments: Baptism to make us his children; Reconciliation to forgive our sins; Confirmation to strengthen us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and, above all, the Eucharist, when he nourishes us with his own Body and Blood.

When Jesus asks us to do tough things, like forgive someone or go out of our way to help someone, he gives us what we need so that we can do it. He gives us his grace.

Conclusion

As we continue this Mass, let's ask Jesus to help us live this Lent as a special season of the Church's year, and above all ask him always to be with us as our Companion and Friend throughout our life.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver