

Our Lady Star of the Sea Church
5731 Amboy Road
Staten Island, New York 10312
(718) 984-0593

Dear Parish Family,

Welcome to the wonderful season of Lent. Last Wednesday we accepted ashes on our foreheads to remind ourselves that we are sinners in need of redemption and that through the prayer, fasting and giving alms, (or charitable contributions), we purge our souls of the effects of sin and prepare ourselves to renew our lives according to our baptismal promises on Easter Sunday. God is offering us new life in the Spirit this Easter. In a very real sense Lent is our Spring Training.

I am so grateful to so many of you who came to confession on Ash Wednesday to begin on the right foot, this holy journey into Easter. We also remember in a special way our candidates for the Easter Sacraments, and our catechumens preparing for Baptism at our Easter Vigil in April. So many people will discuss among themselves, what are you giving up for Lent? Is it bread, wine or beer, trips to Atlantic City, chocolates, desserts, broccoli, or spinach? Some of the more recent penitential practices has been people fasting from Facebook, or their favorite TV shows, or the amount of time they spend texting or the internet in general. I wonder if a more positive approach to fasting might be not what am I giving up, but what am I giving over to the Lord in total surrender. Doing random acts of kindness such as snow-blowing or shoveling walkways for neighbors, calling to check on the elderly by phone to see if they need anything in this bitter cold season; these sorts of things tremendously pleases the Lord.

I brought a long list of intentions with me to France as I entered the 8 day pilgrimage with my brother priests and Cardinal Dolan. It was an awesome and holy experience. We left Feb 4 and returned Feb 12th. The first stop we made was to the home of Saint Therese of Lisieux, where she grew up in Alencon, about a three hour ride north of Paris. Her parents were business people, her dad, Louis was a clock and watch maker, and her mom Zelig, was skilled with making silk embroidery. The Little Flower entered the convent at 15 years of age and we met the Carmelite nuns who now pray in Lisieux. Of the 16 sisters living there now, two lived St. Therese' blood sisters. The basilica dedicated to her and her family is magnificent and we offered Mass there.

The ride to Normandy Beach was another hour and a half. When we got off the bus in Omaha Beach, Utah Beach, Point de Hoc, we were literally blown over. We were met with 80 mph gale force winds from the English Channel. Etienne, our guide, led us into German bunkers, the American National Cemetery, the museum's movie was particularly moving as the testimonies of eyewitnesses were startling. When I realized the bloody cost of freedom from our troops, I was deeply humbled. Even Theodore Roosevelt IV was buried there. Despite the wind we saw and imagined the ravages of D Day 1944. The next day we saw the old city of Rouen, where Saint Joan of Arc was burned at the stake, and onto Paris. We visited Chartres Cathedral built in the 1400's.

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Cardinal Dolan offered Mass at Rue De Bac, the home of the Daughters of Charity and in glass coffins we prayed at the incorruptible remains of Saint Louise De Marillac, Saint Catherine Laboure, and a few blocks away, Saint Vincent De Paul. The Miraculous Medal Novena came from this spot. Cardinal Dolan spoke of a miracle he witnessed in 1975 just before he was ordained. After that visit we celebrated his 65th birthday. On Sunday Morning from 8-12 we toured Paris. What a beautiful city, and I was impressed with the monuments to George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson there. After seeing the beautiful chapel of Saint Louis IX of France, San Chappel we offered Mass at the magnificent Notre Dame Cathedral and that rose window was breathtaking. We then went to Sacre Coeur Basilica in Mountmartre section. There the Blessed Sacrament has been in perpetual adoration for over 130 years. The following morning we gathered at the glass coffin of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, the founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and offered Mass before boarding a plane for Pau –Pyrennes Airport and our hour bus ride to Lourdes. We had two full days in Lourdes and were treated to a healing service in the underground basilica which holds 25,000 people. After visiting the grotto where Mary appeared to Saint Bernadette, we joined in the recitation of the rosary and the candle light procession. Of all the people there 20,000 people came from all over Italy. The next morning at the International Mass offered by the Bishop of Lourdes, over 1000 priests concelebrated. It was a very moving experience. I remembered each of you and come home with many graces and thankful to God (and St. Anthony) that after 4 days my luggage finally arrived home.

Getting back to Lent, how does this affect me? Well I am aware of the mercy of Jesus, the healing of Jesus, the generosity of people who are filled with faith and the power of prayer. I am grateful to Cardinal Dolan choosing to spend time with us and be one of us and it was good for him to spend time with us before heading to Rome for the Consistory where Pope Francis made 20 more Cardinals.

Although we've been dealing with extremely cold and snowy weather, the mid-winter break for our school children, President's Day and Ash Wednesday this past week, the Lord is at work deep within preparing our hearts for even greater blessings.

May God bless you all throughout this upcoming Lent.

Fr. Tom Devery