



Our Faith in Action

American Martyrs Catholic Community

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR *A Few Thoughts on Lent 2013*

Dear Parishioners,

Lent is upon us. The Christmas decorations are barely back in their boxes and we are asked to change gears. Our church year is fascinating from within but for those not of our faith the moving dates are hard to understand. There is a rhythm that is not always easily understood yet, rhythm there is and somehow it all comes together. So, the Baptism of the Lord has closed out the Christmas season. Now we have a few weeks of ordinary time to help us refocus before we look to Lent.

The familiar questions we hear asked about Lent are “What are you doing for Lent?” “What are you going to give up for Lent?” Is it more important to do penance by “giving up” something or “by doing” something extra? I’d like to propose an idea. Why not look at Lent this year as a “building of opportunity.” In it there are many rooms. For example, “the room of self denial,” “the room of prayer,” “the room of Christian action,” “the room of family,” “the room of vocation.” There are many other rooms. You may find one more suitable for you.

As you walk into your chosen room, look around. See the choices before you! For example, in the room of prayer you may look at how you celebrate Mass. Are you regularly on time? Could you arrive even five or 10 minutes earlier to reflect? As Mass ends, what about remaining until the choir has completed the closing hymn before leaving?

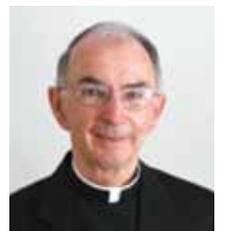
Maybe you could consider a daily Mass, or an extra five minutes a day in prayer, Bible reading or visiting the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, reading a spiritual book, praying the rosary. These are just a few ideas to consider; there are many more in that room. Mentally look around, then you make one choice and really commit yourself to it. Lent will be a great experience for your spiritual life.

Check out the family room or any other room. The idea is the same — one room, look at the choices, choose one in the room. Make your commitment. Otherwise, we will go everywhere and arrive nowhere. Often we are tempted to begin our renewal by trying to run a marathon when we haven’t yet worked on a 5K.

Have a great Lent! If all of us do one thing well, all of us will grow and have a more joy filled vibrant community as we prepare for the great feast of Easter. We will have learned to walk more in step with Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and be ready to celebrate His Resurrection.

In Christ,

Rev. Msgr. John F. Barry, P.A.
Pastor



STEWARDSHIP OF TREASURE

Giving to God First

Have you ever wondered why no one really becomes uneasy when someone brings up the first two “Ts” of stewardship — giving of your time or talents — but when the third “T” comes up, many of us become uncomfortable?

That third “T” is treasure, and some people simply become so annoyed by the subject, they tune out the words from the pulpit.

Why is there seemingly such an adverse reaction?

Our finances are such a personal subject. Discussing money issues with others is not easy, and having someone tell us what to do with our finances is even worse. We earn the money, after all. So shouldn't we decide what to do with it?

Of course, the answer is “yes” — we decide every day how to spend our hard-earned dollars. Indeed, the monetary choices we make will either keep our finances in check, or put us into the red. The average American family has about \$7,000 in credit card debt — so finances certainly represent a challenge to our current society. Tight budgets, trying to keep up with the “Joneses” or poor financial management



may be to blame for our tight resources. Does this mean we do not have anything left over for God?

Stewardship, at its roots, teaches that we are not supposed to give God our “leftovers.” We should instead strive to return to God a portion of our “first fruits” — giving to God first and then using the rest for our other needs. God gave us our talents that help us earn a living, after all. He should come first.

This idea can be worrisome for many. If our finances are already strained, how will we ever find enough to give back to God? Or,

if we do try to give God our “first fruits,” will there be enough left over to cover our required expenses?

Taking the correct financial steps toward good stewardship simply boils down to trust — believing that God, who takes care of all of His creation, will take care of us. Trust that in giving to God first, we are both acknowledging that our multitude of blessings come from Him, and that we are thankful He chose to give them to us. And finally, trust that if we give to Him first, that all else will fall into place — because He is in ultimate control.

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ENJOY FAITH AND FELLOWSHIP AMONG PEERS IN THE TNT MINISTRY



TNT Ministry members participate in a Habitat for Humanity build



TNT Ministry members attend a golf-themed Summer Social event

If you are looking for a chance to draw closer to Christ while having fun and enjoying fellowship of similarly aged Catholics, the TNT Ministry may provide the perfect opportunity to do just that.

TNT — Twenties and Thirties Ministry — is American Martyrs' ministry for parishioners in the 20s and 30s age range. This ministry hosts a variety of spiritual, social and service events intended to build and strengthen the Catholic faith and create a sense of fellowship, all while giving back to the parish and the community.

"The goal of TNT is to provide opportunities for young adults at the parish to build and share their Catholic faith, create a sense of fellowship, and give back to the parish and the community," says Lindsey.

The ministry hosts a variety of social, spiritual and service events throughout the year, including a Bible study and spiritual book club, TNT Masses and retreats, house parties after Sunday night Mass, Holy Happy Hours, Bowling and Trivia Nights. The ministry also serves lunch at St. Francis Food Kitchen, and performs service projects during the Christmas season.

Having become involved with the ministry since joining the parish a year and a half ago, Lindsey credits TNT with helping her to meet other young adults in the area who share her faith, as well as providing the opportunity to make some great friends.

"I would definitely encourage other 20s and 30s in the parish to take part in the ministry," says Lindsey.

"TNT has helped me grow in my faith through fellowship with other young adult Catholics."

The ministry is open to all parishioners ages 21 to 39, married or single. Lindsey says that some may mistake TNT for a singles group, but this is not the case. There are certainly a number of single ministry members, but there are also married couples — several with children — who participate in TNT.

The TNT Ministry does not hold regularly scheduled and structured meetings. Instead, all events and planning meetings are publicized through e-mail and on the American Martyrs 20s and 30s Ministry Facebook page.

"Our mailing list goes to over 300 people, but we typically have between eight and 25 people at our events," Lindsey says. "It's a great way to meet new people because there is always a different group of people at each event."

The TNT Ministry most certainly welcomes suggestions for events and activities. If someone has an idea for an event they'd like to plan or suggest, the group is always open to hear new ideas.

To register for the ministry mailing list, please e-mail Lindsey Willoughby at tnt@americanmartyrs.org. E-mails are sent via the mailing list every couple of weeks, and these contain information about upcoming events and ways to get involved. Interested parishioners may also "Like" the ministry's Facebook page.

PRE-CANA MINISTRY PROVIDES ESSENTIAL GUIDANCE TO ENGAGED COUPLES



Jeff and Joanne Harang lead a discussion on communication during a Pre-Cana Marriage Preparation class.



Class participants listen to Fr. Barry's presentation on the Sacrament of Marriage

For a new couple, falling in love is the easy part. And once they decide to marry, the couple begins a period of their lives which is both exciting and full of promise. But with all of the planning that goes into preparing for a single day – the wedding day – it is easy to lose sight of the fact that it is even more important to prepare to enter into a covenant which involves a lifetime commitment.

How does one prepare for such a life-altering event? Fortunately, couples are not alone in making this preparation — with the Pre-Cana Marriage Preparation Ministry offered by our parish, engaged couples can enter into a time of discernment and self-discovery, with an opportunity to seriously examine their relationship prior to marriage. The class is a requirement for all engaged couples seeking to be married in the Catholic Church, and participants come away with an awareness of the importance of faith in marriage.

“The underlying message in our sessions is that there are really three of you in a marriage — you, your spouse and God,” says Dennis Labriola, who coordinates the ministry along with his wife, Renay. “Marriage is a lifelong commitment, and in order for it to work, God has to be part of it.”

Offered six times a year, the day-long classes are always conducted on a Saturday from 8:30 a.m. until 6 p.m., and include breakfast, lunch and snacks. All required materials for the classes are also included. During the session, four specific

topics are covered — communication, spirituality of marriage, finances, and marital intimacy. In addition, Father Barry gives a special presentation on marriage as a Sacrament.

Each session is designed to help the couple enter into a discussion of key issues, and the thought-provoking questions help to create a forum for open, honest dialogue. For example, the communication session discusses various personality types. The session on spirituality explores how faith has affected the couples' lives. And during the marital intimacy session, couples learn more about each other, as well as share discussion on other topics such as parenting and natural family planning.

Indeed, just as important for engaged couples to discuss communication, spirituality or intimacy is the matter of money.

“People are surprised that we also offer a session on finances,” says Dennis. “But more and more couples are getting married later in life. As a result, they already have careers. Couples need to discuss how to merge their finances, and it's good to settle these things before marriage.”

What makes the Pre-Cana classes especially beneficial is that the sessions are facilitated by married couples who share their insights, advice and experiences on what it takes to make a marriage work. These presenting couples also go through a training period. In addition to sitting through a Pre-Cana session to view how the process works, each couple

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Class attendees listen to a presentation on finances and marriage



Couples write a love letter to one another, which can be shared that evening, on the couple's wedding day, or even on their first wedding anniversary

selects the session they would like to conduct, and builds on materials used during past sessions in order to reflect their own marriage experience.

“Having married couples conduct the sessions makes the entire experience more personal,” says Dennis. “With honesty and humor, they tell their story during the first part of the class, and then use the rest of the time for exercises designed to encourage the engaged couples to interact, discuss and provide feedback.”

As insightful and productive as this program is for engaged couples, it is equally rewarding for the presenting couples. When Dennis and his wife were first asked to coordinate the program, he initially declined. But with Renay’s encouragement — and some prompting from the Holy Spirit — his “no” became a “yes” which has lasted almost 15 years. And in the process of helping others, their own marriage has been strengthened.

“Conducting a session for the Pre-Cana Ministry involves a lot of preparation,” says Dennis. “And that preparation means presenting couples have to sit down and talk about what they are going to say — it’s a gift of time to re-connect with your spouse.”

Finally, marriage is much more than a wedding day, and the entire Pre-Cana process is a wonderful opportunity for couples to discern marriage as a vocation and to spend their engagement learning more about each other and God’s love for them. And with the help of the presenters, the couple is able to meet other couples who demonstrate just how love can be stronger and deeper when its source is found in our God.

Those who would like to attend a Pre-Cana Marriage Preparation class, or would like more information on volunteering as a presenting couple, are encouraged to contact Dennis and Renay Labriola by home phone at 310-374-4309, cell phone at 310-345-2401, or by e-mail at precana@americanmartyrs.org.

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— Dennis Labriola

CELEBRATING THE MIRACLE OF ST. BLASE

Feast Day, February 3

Every year on February 3, we celebrate the Feast day of St. Blase, bishop and martyr. In remembrance of this great saint, priests at most parishes around the world bless the throats of the faithful at Masses on this feast day.

Year after year, many of us step into line to receive the blessing — yet how many of us know the reason why St. Blase is associated with the blessing of throats? What are the origins of this yearly ritual?

Though we do not know much about the life of St. Blase, tradition tells us that he was born to wealthy, saintly Catholic parents. Born in Armenia, he devoted his life to medicine and helping the sick. He was a physician, until he was begged by the people to become their bishop. He was appointed by the Church as bishop of the Diocese of Sebaste.

Around the year 313, when the Roman Emperor Licinius was persecuting the Church, Blase lived as a hermit in the woods among animals that he befriended. One day, a group of hunters found Blase and seized him. Upon their trip to the governor, they encountered a woman whose pig was being attacked by a wolf. Blase commanded the wolf to leave the pig alone and, upon his command, the pig was freed unharmed. Blase was then taken to prison, where he miraculously healed a boy who was choking to death on a fishbone. While Blase remained in prison, the woman whose pig he had freed brought him two candles to serve as his light so that he could read the Scripture.

It was from the miracle of saving the choking boy that the custom of praying to St. Blase to cure all ailments of the throat was borne. And, so, after still refusing to recant his Christian beliefs, he was suspended from a tree and his flesh was torn with iron combs or rakes.

Blase was then thrown into a lake to drown. To the surprise of his persecutors, he surfaced and walked upon the water, and he invited his persecutors to join him. They should do this, he said, to show the power of their gods. The pagans took him up on his invitation, and ultimately they were drowned. Blase was then told by an angel to return to dry land to receive martyrdom. He was beheaded on the shore and immediately went to Heaven.



Because of his prison experience and his great reputation as a healer, St. Blase's intercession is invoked for the healing of diseases affecting the throat. The candles that the clergy place upon our throats while blessing them symbolize the candles that enlightened St. Blase's cell as he studied Sacred Scripture — connecting his spiritual life to the physical healing. Let us remember to invoke the intercession of this great healer upon any ailments that might be affecting us, either physical or spiritual — especially those pertaining to the throat.

The blessing of the throats is done by the priest holding two blessed candles near the throat in the form of a cross. The priest says, "Through the merits and intercession of St. Blase, bishop and martyr, may God deliver thee from all diseases of the throat, and preserve thee from every other evil. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

A LOOK BACK AT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK 2013

Every year, beginning on the last Sunday in January, Catholic schools across the country join in their observation of Catholic Schools Week, a nationwide celebration of Catholic education sponsored by the National Catholic Educational Association and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.



“All Catholic schools across the nation are celebrating the same week,” says Camryn Connelly, principal of American Martyrs Catholic School. “So it also allows us to come together with other schools throughout the state and nationally to know that every Catholic student is celebrating who we are throughout the week. Not only are we a parish community, we are a local community as well as a community with all Catholic schools across the country.”

Catholic Schools Week has a different theme for each year. This year’s theme was “Catholic Schools Raise the Standards.” Each school celebrates Catholic Schools Week in its own unique way. Here at American Martyrs Catholic School, the week kicked off on Sunday, Jan. 27 with a special Mass, where students and faculty wore American Martyr School spirit wear, and Student Council members dressed in their uniforms and acted as greeters.

Each day of the week at school was designated to celebrate a different aspect of Catholic education, and each day had accompanying prayer intention.

“It’s really about celebrating our Catholic community as a whole,” Ms. Connelly says. “Our school is one ministry of our parish, so it’s celebrating that ministry. If it weren’t for our church we wouldn’t be here. I look at it as a week to be proud of who we are and what we’ve accomplished, and to recognize the people who give their time and talent to help us be who we are.”

Monday was set aside to celebrate our priests and religious, and to pray for vocations. At the assembly, they prayed the Angelus as a gift to Msgr. Barry and presented cards to the priests and deacons.

On Tuesday, the school celebrated their teachers and staff, praying for and thanking the teachers, maintenance crew, aides, front office personnel and administration. On Wednesday, the celebration focused on the students, while the prayer intention was for children who are lonely or sick. The students were assigned no homework and were given a free dress day. There was also a Family Bingo Night Wednesday evening in O’Donnell Hall.

Thursday was a day to celebrate the students’ parents, and they prayed for and thanked the parents for their love and support. The students wrote thank-you cards to their parents, which they received at an Open House that evening. There was also a Teacher Reception hosted by the School Board.

The week ended on Friday, with the school celebrating our Nation and the world. The day included a First Friday Mass, as well as ice skating.

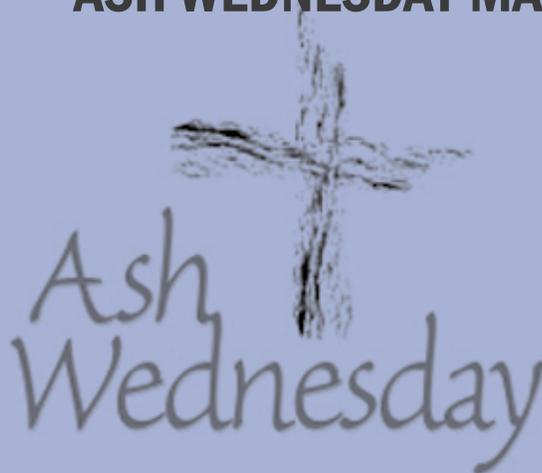
On top of the celebrations of each day, there were some activities that happened throughout Catholic Schools Week, like “buddy time,” “random get up and dance moments,” teacher lunches and trivia questions.

All the events and activities surrounding Catholic Schools Week shared one common aim — to celebrate and promote the gift of Catholic education.

“It’s important that our students recognize that they are involved in something surrounded by their faith and that their parents really sacrifice to put them in a school that is based in their Catholicism,” Ms. Connelly says. “And schools across the country have red ribbon week and things like that, but this is really about us being a Catholic school, and we’re a Catholic school first and foremost. It’s about celebrating why we’re here, and that is to be a Catholic community. It’s a week to celebrate who we are and what we do. It’s a community effort, so to be able to thank our parents and our students and our faculty and staff and our clergy, it’s a wonderful week to reflect on what we have and everything we’re blessed with.”

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ASH WEDNESDAY MASS SCHEDULE



6:30 a.m.
8:00 a.m.
9:00 a.m.
12:10 p.m.
3:30 p.m.
5:00 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday, 5:00 p.m. | **Sunday**, 7:00 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m.

Monday/Wednesday/Friday, 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m.

Tuesday/Thursday, 6:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m.

Holy Day, 5:00 p.m. (Vigil), 6:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m., 7:30 p.m.