

MARCH 2013

# Our Faith in Action

American Martyrs Catholic Community

## A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

### *Easter — the Holiest Time of the Year*

Dear Parishioners,

What a historic time to be alive in our Catholic Church. Pope Benedict XVI has chosen to resign as Pope and to spend his life in prayer and writing. He teaches his greatest lesson as he shows us how to be a faithful disciple—to follow Jesus who emptied Himself for our sake.

Some people may wish to put a negative spin on Pope Benedict's decision. We will always have such people in our midst. It takes but a cursory reading of the Gospels to see how people viewed Jesus with suspicion and misjudgment. As Roman Catholics we need to look at all that is good in our Church and to be grateful for the people who sit with us at the Eucharistic table. The Servant of the Servants, the Pope, enabled us to better see Lent as a journey of faith. His example of self denial gives us a greater appreciation of how we may enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus as we prepare for the joy of Easter.

Before you receive this newsletter, we may have a new leader in our Church. We will not live with "two Popes." We will have one voice of teaching authority given to the new successor of Peter. Let us pray



for him and ask God to strengthen his spirit and give him the love and understanding he will need in his sacred ministry.

As Easter approaches, it is our duty to show the world the loving face of Christ. We have journeyed with "forgiveness" as our Lenten theme; it is now a time to rejoice in what the practice of forgiveness means in our daily lives. We are always in the shadow of His Cross but never to remain on Calvary but to see and witness to the Risen Lord who overcame death. Jesus redeemed us to become a people of forgiveness and loving service bringing good news to the world, reminding those who cross our path that love and healing always win. In the end, we are an Easter people rejoicing in allowing His peace and light to flood our hearts.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. John Barry". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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 re-



turn 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 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.

## PARISH MEALS PROVIDE PERFECT LENTEN FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY

On Feb. 15, a decades-old American Martyrs tradition resumed as the parish hosted its first of seven Lenten Friday Dinners.

Coordinated by sisters Kristen Dorr and Jennifer Rodriguez, the dinner features a different meatless soup every week, along with pasta, green salad, rolls, fruit, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

“People say they really like our soups — they might just be saying that, but I don’t think so,” Kristen says with a laugh. “One thing is for sure — nobody goes home hungry! I know that Msgr. Barry really wants to encourage parishioners getting together and sharing each other’s company during Lent. These dinners provide a great place for people to come in, sit with old friends, make new friends, and eat a good meal together as a community!”

Designed to offer a fellowship opportunity for parishioners during the Lenten season, the soup suppers are held in conjunction with the 5 p.m. Stations of the Cross and the 5:30 p.m. Mass. Held in O’Donnell Hall, the dinner is served from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. each Friday throughout Lent, including Good Friday.

“We have a lot of different groups that come,” Kristen says. “There is an older group that has been coming since the suppers got started 30 or more years ago. There are also a lot of school and parish families that come, too.

It’s a great family environment. To keep the kids occupied, we set up a movie in the SS. Brigid and Brendan Room.”

After a big crowd on opening night that sometimes tops 300, most weeks there are between 150 to 200 parishioners and guests in attendance. To facilitate feeding such large crowds, Kristen and Jennifer rely on a dedicated team of volunteers that come and prepare the meal ahead of time.

“We have a core group of some friends of ours that comes in from about 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. every Friday,” Kristen says. “A couple of women chop things up and assemble the soup, a couple of others prepare the salad and cut oranges, and a few gentlemen take care of the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.”

Later in the day, another set of volunteers arrives to serve the food.

“In the evening I have three regulars that wash dishes, assemble the pasta and run the condiment table, but we try to have different groups from parish ministries get involved in serving the food every week,” Kristen says. “In the past we’ve had the Knights of Columbus, the Men’s and Women’s Cornerstone, RCIA, the Respect Life Ministry, Mothers of Young Children, the Girl Scouts and others.”

There is no charge for the meal, but the parish suggests a small donation of \$5 per person or \$20 per family. Any funds generated by

the meals go toward assisting the needy in local communities.

Kristen and Jennifer are always looking for extra hands to help serve. If you or your parish ministry would like to volunteer, please contact Kristen Dorr directly at 310-469-2941 or [dorr.kristen@gmail.com](mailto:dorr.kristen@gmail.com).



## COME CLOSER TO CHRIST ON THE RCIA JOURNEY

---

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults — RCIA — is the process in which adults are able to discern and then begin their initiation into the Catholic Church. RCIA is open not only to un-baptized candidates, but also to those who have been baptized in another Christian tradition, or those who were baptized in the Catholic Church but did not receive catechesis or other sacraments afterwards.

This year at American Martyrs, 24 participants have gone through the RCIA process — 12 are catechumens who will be baptized at the upcoming Easter Vigil Mass, while the other 12 are candidates who, by receiving the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confirmation, will be fully initiated into the Church at the 5 p.m. Mass on Easter Sunday.

RCIA classes at American Martyrs usually begin in September, and are held once a week on Wednesday nights.

"Each week, they are given something to read and reflect on," says Deacon Derek Brown, who directs RCIA along with his wife, Terri. "We begin with a prayer, and then we have small group sharing about the readings that were assigned. Then, for 20 minutes or so we allow them to share any insights, thoughts or questions they have from the reading."

The participants then have the opportunity during the class session to focus on particular topics relevant to their journey.

"We dive into discussions on the topic that we have planned for that class session, anything from the nature of God, to the existence of God, to the image of Christ, to the sacraments themselves," says Deacon Derek. "We'll cover Catholic moral teaching and Catholic social teaching, as well as Catholic culture, prayers, and what it means to be Catholic. We sometimes bring in guest speakers to share their expertise as well, so that they get a taste of the community."

The first phase of RCIA, the precatechumenate, includes both those who are sure they want to become Catholic, as well as those who are sim-



ply considering it and want to learn more about the faith and Catholic life. Although RCIA begins in September, the program often receives interest from people in January. Since, at that point, the program will have already been underway for several months, Deacon Derek and Terri hope to implement a parallel inquiry program for these individuals. This program will allow them to learn more about the Church sooner rather than waiting for RCIA to start again later in the year.

The second phase, the catechumenate, continues the RCIA process through a more prolonged period of formation. The third phase is the period of purification and enlightenment, which coincides with the season of Lent and is a time to intensify the preparation for Baptism and full communion with the Church. The final step of the RCIA process, leading into the fourth phase, is initiation.

*continued on next page*

## COME CLOSER TO CHRIST *continued from page 4*



This occurs at the Easter Vigil for the catechumens and on Easter Sunday for the candidates.

After the participants' reception into the Church, the final phase, mystagogia, begins. In this phase, the newly initiated begin to reflect on the mysteries they have just experienced. This phase does not end with a rite, since this process is meant to continue throughout their lives.

"Although the classes only go on for a certain amount of time, the process itself is 365 days a year," Deacon Derek says. "The process is ongoing in that our priests, staff, parishioners and anyone involved in RCIA are always inviting people to investigate the process."

In addition to this RCIA process, candidates and catechumens also participate in a retreat day at St. John Fisher for all RCIA participants in the San Pedro region.

"The themes are usually about spiritual formation, about what life these people are saying 'yes' to," Deacon Derek says. "You have to remember that this is a Christian life that they are being initiated into. The Church is simply a doorway into the Christian life."

Parishioners who wish to assist with the RCIA program can do so by serving as sponsors.

"Every year, we are always in need of sponsors — those who would journey as a faith partner with these people who are making a choice to become fully initiated in the Catholic Church," says Deacon Derek. "We are in need of good practicing Catholics who can walk with these people."

Those who are considering initiation into the Catholic Church, or who would like to learn more about the faith, are encouraged to take part in the RCIA program at American Martyrs.

"For those who hear or feel a stirring in themselves to explore their faith a little more deeply in the context of the Catholic Church, we always say that it's not answers that lead us to God — it's questions," Deacon Derek says. "If you want to explore any and all questions you have about your faith, then RCIA is one of the vehicles to do that."

*"Although the classes only go on for a certain amount of time, the process itself is 365 days a year.*

*The process is ongoing in that our priests, staff, parishioners and anyone involved in RCIA are always inviting people to investigate the process."*

*— Deacon Derek Brown*

## PALM SUNDAY TAIKO DRUM PROCESSION: *10-Year Anniversary Celebration*

In the Gospel of John, we read one of the accounts of Palm Sunday. This particular Gospel shares that the people of Jerusalem took palm branches and went out to meet Him. They cried out "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel!" We can imagine the joy and jubilation, the parade and procession, the laughter, and the music and songs of the celebration.

Welcoming the Lord in this joyous manner is celebrated annually in the Church on the Sunday prior to Easter Sunday. Here at American Martyrs, there is a unique element that has become a traditional part of our Palm Sunday celebration.

For the past 10 years, the seventh grade class from American Martyrs has led the Palm Sunday procession by playing taiko drums, a Japanese form of percussion. Taiko, which means "drum" in Japanese, is a long-standing form of music historically used in martial or military settings, as well as in court music performed in castles and shrines throughout ancient Japan. The taiko drums were brought to the American Martyrs seventh-graders through the vision of Ron Tanski, the music teacher for the kindergarten through eighth grades.

"I was listening to a homily, and they were talking about how when Jesus was coming in for Palm Sunday, people were celebrating and cheering, and there would have been traditional music," Mr. Tanski says. "I thought, I'm teaching taiko drums to the seventh grade — wouldn't it be cool to take all these drums and make a rhythm reminiscent of something Middle Eastern? It would be awesome to do something similar to what went on in Jesus' time."

After talking to his friends from the Middle East, Ron wrote and composed a rhythmic piece that was simple and similar to what might have been played in Jerusalem at the time of Palm Sunday. In addition to

taiko drums, the students use water bottles and other percussion instruments native to the time and era, such as bells and gongs. These drums and forms of percussion lead the Palm Sunday processions at the 9:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Masses.

"In the seventh grade curriculum, we focus on rhythm and the taiko drums," Mr. Tanski says. "The first year, I thought that we would do this once and that it would be great. The next year, I got a call from the rectory asking to do it again, and then again the next year. This is now our 10th year, and it has become one of those things that started out as something to do, and now it's a mini-tradition."

The preparation for leading the procession is intense, and the students begin practicing at the beginning of each school year.

"The practice is a lot of work," says Mr. Tanski. "Normally the average Palm Sunday procession

time is eight minutes. There was one time that the procession was four minutes, and it has gone as long as 13 minutes. In the practice time, I get the kids up to 15 minutes of playing. Playing a simple, rhythmic beat for 15 minutes is really difficult — it becomes almost hypnotic."

With Lent starting earlier this year and Palm Sunday coming quickly after Christmas break, we are blessed that year's seventh-graders are natural taiko drummers.

"The kids are amped up and are really, really solid," Mr. Tanski says. "Over the years, the students reactions differ — some years, the kids have been nervous, while other years, they've been really into it and couldn't wait to do it. This is one of those years, where the kids are ready to go."

As we celebrate Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem this year, we also celebrate 10 years of being blessed by the musical talents of our seventh-graders, as well as the dedication and creativity of teacher Ron Tanski.



*American Martyrs seventh grade students line the entrance to the church during the 2008 Palm Sunday Procession. Students practice for the procession starting the beginning of the school year and work up to playing a rhythmic beat for 15 minutes.*

## THE HUMBLE SERVANTS OF THE ALTAR SOCIETY

Week after week, we worship in a clean church with beaming white altar clothes, sparkling dirt-free floors, and a crying room emptied of last week's dropped Cheerios. Have you ever wondered who washes the cups or presses Father's vestments? This work is not carried out by a housekeeping or maid service — instead, we are blessed each week by a team of humble volunteers, the Altar Society.

"We have a core team that cleans the church once a week, and most do it as a devotion or a prayer, if you will," says Dorothy Higi, president of the American Martyrs Altar Society since 2008 and member of ten years.

The approximately 125 members of the Altar Society give varying amounts of time to the upkeep of the church.

"There are some who clean sacred vessels or clean the brass, and if they can't make it on cleaning day, they come by themselves on another day," Dorothy says. "We have men that do the vacuuming, and they are wonderful, dependable people. One lady oversees the linen cleaning, and she has a list of about 22 volunteers who rotate every other month picking up purificators from the sacristy every week, laundering them and bringing them back."

In addition to washing, dusting, vacuuming, polishing, and tidying everything — from the sanctuary to the chapel and holy water fonts — the Altar Society gives back to the parish in various other ways. The society holds sales, raffles, and luncheons, the proceeds of which go to the parish. The Altar Society also sponsors the annual parish Lenten Retreat and holds monthly society meetings, which often feature guest speakers.



*Pictured here are some members of the Altar Society, (from left) Tere Akuna, Linda Smith-Jones, Dorothy Higi, Rita Hanretty, Annabeth Kirchner, Enza Decenza, Georgianna Wagniere, Boo Hanretty, Alexa Grollman, Mary Ann Millar, and Ray Steck.*

For Dorothy, the Altar Society was a way to give back for all the many gifts she has received.

"I really became active in this ministry when my husband passed away five years ago," Dorothy says. "We had been married for 56 years, and it was quite a change for me. I must say in all truthfulness, I certainly have received more out of my involvement than I give to it. It has enhanced my faith life. Faith gets me through each day. I'm very fortunate to be busy and to be 81 years old and still going. I am so blessed by the people I have met through this ministry."

Volunteers and new members are always welcome to join the Altar Society.

Parishioners of all ages, male and female, can give as much of their time as they are able. If interested, please contact Dorothy Higi at 310-545-2016 or [higisr@verizon.net](mailto:higisr@verizon.net).

"We are a very friendly bunch," Dorothy says. "We get it done with love for God and His home, camaraderie, caring for each other and by having lots of fun together. We would love to have you become a member. We need you, and you just might like us!"

*"I certainly have received more out of my involvement than I give to it. It has enhanced my faith life. Faith gets me through each day. I'm very fortunate to be busy and to be 81 years old and still going. I am so blessed by the people I have met through this ministry." — Dorothy Higi*

624 15th Street  
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266  
Phone: (310) 545-5651  
www.americanmartyrs.org

## FROM THE CATECHISM

### *What is Almsgiving?*

During the seasons of Advent and Lent, it is not uncommon to hear about fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Most of us are familiar with at least two of the three penitential practices — prayer and fasting. We engage in prayer each day, while fasting becomes a regular part of our Lenten routines.

But what is almsgiving?

It is simply giving to those less fortunate than ourselves. This can be through donations of canned goods to the local food pantry, spare change to the Salvation Army during the Christmas season, or even through person-to-person contact with the poor.

This Lent, if your family has not regularly engaged in almsgiving, consider making a change. Search for opportunities to serve the poor and vulnerable, making their lives easier – even if in a small way.

### **Things to do with your family**

- Place a coffee can in a prominent place in your home, and commit to filling it with loose change throughout the week. Then, donate the money to a local charity.
- The next time you shop for groceries, buy a few extra canned goods and donate them to a food pantry or food bank.
- Research a charity that works with the poor, and make a commitment to regularly give to the organization.
- Resolve to never judge those who are less fortunate, and teach your children the same.

---

## 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. | **Saturday**, 8:00 a.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.