



Our Faith in Action

American Martyrs Catholic Community

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

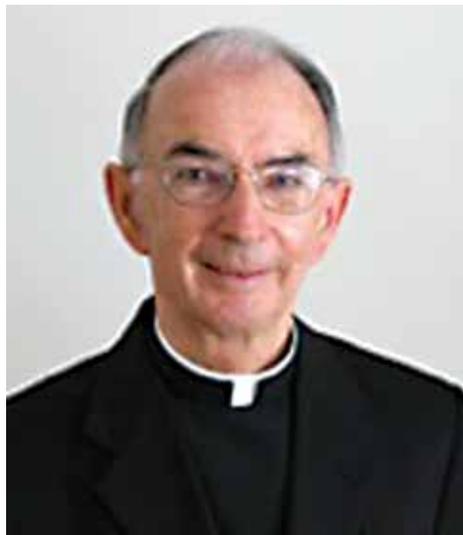
Lent Provides Opportunities for Growth During Coldness of Winter

Dear Parishioners,

I hope you are enjoying the *Our Faith In Action* newsletter. It provides us another way of connecting with “family” news. We are so blessed to have an alive and active community where people celebrate the bonds of our friendship in Christ.

When I was growing up in Ireland, March was always a month when the cold of winter winds clashed with the hopeful new life winds of spring. Everything in nature seemed to be struggling to work for growth and freshness while winter fought against it with its last breath. The same is evident in our parish, where we are continuously blessed with new ideas, new growth possibilities and the winds that challenge us to progress. We are blessed and tested. And as a result, we walk into Easter as a people freshly realizing our life in Christ through Baptism.

Lent gives us a perfect time to clear away some of the “deadness” of winter and check the well-being of our souls. As Christians, we accept the call to constant



conversion and renewal. We are called to do something positive as a gift for our spiritual life, including the call to do penance. The penances we do within our Catholic faith are pretty much left up to us. One thought: why not give up negativism in all its forms — gossip, criticism of family, friends, co-workers and, yes, of our Church, the Body of Christ, where all of us draw life from Christ who is our Head? A penance like this is a perfect “diet” to revitalize our souls.

As you reflect on your prayer life and seek spiritual enrichment, consider some of the opportunities offered throughout Lent. Why not find out more about the multi-parish speaker series “Dive-In University Series South” at www.diveinuss.org? Here in our own parish, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe will speak at all Sunday Masses on March 16 and continue his talks as our Lenten Mission speaker on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, March 17 to 19. Give yourself this great Lenten gift alone or in

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STEWARDS OF OUR RESOURCES

The Finance Council

We may not initially consider the task of overseeing parish finances as a church ministry — but that is exactly what it is, and our Finance Council is a very important ministry for our parish.

“The parish has many different ministries, all important to the parish,” says Charles Wilmot, President of the Finance Council. “But the one ministry you have to have is the Finance Council.”

Since 1983, every Catholic parish has been required under Canon Law to have a finance council. Here at American Martyrs, our Finance Council consults and advises our pastor on all things related to the parish’s finances, including the oversight and review of the school budget, reviews of insurance needs, and financial audits of parish ministries.

The members of the Finance Council hold meetings on the second Wednesday of every month in order to review monthly financial reports and discuss parish finances. These meetings include reports from the subcommittees within the council, as well as a report on the state of the parish from Msgr. Barry. In turn, the council provides Monsignor with their financial counsel.

“Many times, we also provide that counsel to the ministries, or it could apply to the actual church budget and finances,” Charles says. “That counsel comes from the knowledge and experience that the group has working with our parish, our school and our various ministries.”



Charles Wilmot, Finance Council President

Charles has been a member of the Finance Council for several years. His service in the group has opened his eyes to the important role that the council plays in our community, and how the council helps our parish to be good stewards of its resources.

“The Finance Council subcommittees are hands on,” Charles says. “The Budget

Committee monitors each ministry’s budget, the school budget, and the parish budget. The Audit Committee focuses on internal audits and controls for any part of the parish that is involved with money, handling cash or has a budget. It makes recommendations when it seems as if internal controls can be strengthened. Every year, the council will perform several audits. If we find inefficiencies, we will make recommendations that turn into actions in which the process or the control will be changed.”

In this way, the Finance Council helps ensure that we are making the best use of not only our parish budget, but also the finances of the school and many of our various parish ministries as good stewards of treasure.

“It’s focused on internal audits and controls of any part of the parish that is involved with money, handling cash or has a budget,” Charles says. “The way the Finance Council touches the community is that we’re actively involved behind the scenes with any ministry that has a budget in advising and recommending to the pastor the best practices in budgeting and internal audit control.”

For more information about the Finance Council email Charles at financecouncil@americanmartyrs.org.

THE WISE MEN'S GIFTS SYMBOLIZE OUR LENTEN OBLIGATIONS

We experience great joy when we celebrate the coming of the Magi at Epiphany each year. For many of us, it is the completion of Christmas. Yet, the gifts offered by the Magi — gold, frankincense and myrrh — can be a guide for us as we plan our Lenten observances this year.

It may seem strange to connect the joyful celebration of Epiphany with the penitential season of Lent. Yet, our spiritual life should not be divided into separate bits having no connection. In the same way, the Church's liturgical year should flow from one season to another. The different feasts and seasons certainly have different emphases, but they are intended to build on one another. The traditional pillars of our Lenten observance are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These in turn come from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). So how can we connect what the Magi gave Jesus with what we're going to offer Him this Lent? Actually the wise men's gifts match up surprisingly well.

Frankincense is the basic ingredient in the incense used in the worship of God, in the ancient world and in the Church today. Offering it to Jesus points out His divine nature, and so it symbolizes prayer. Our Lenten observance needs to include prayer and worship. Of course, we are bound to worship at Sunday Mass year-round. During Lent, we might add a weekday



Mass. Perhaps we can increase the time we devote to private prayer at home or at Adoration. Devotional reading from the Bible or another appropriate book can be added. And don't forget the possibility of adding family devotions during Lent, so the whole family prays together.

When we offer our gold to Christ to build His Church and to help His poor, we are engaged in almsgiving. While giving from the treasure God has entrusted to us is a duty throughout the whole year, maybe this Lent we can practice being a little more generous than usual. If our giving is a thankful response to the gift of eternal life that God has given us, we will find that the giving is indeed a means of grace.

For centuries, myrrh has been associated with fasting. In the ancient world, it was regularly used in embalming. Generations of theological writers have seen the gift of myrrh as a foreshadowing of Christ's sufferings. Fasting strengthens us in holiness and prepares us to come into God's

presence after our own deaths. St. Thomas Aquinas himself linked myrrh with repentance and fasting when he wrote that myrrh represents the penance by which we preserve our souls from the corruption of sin.

Fasting may be the most difficult to observe for modern Americans. After all, most of the advertising and many of the magazine articles we see are devoted to making us more, not less, comfortable. We usually think of fasting only under the heading of dieting to lose weight. Instead, think of fasting as a way to become more spiritually fit. Body and spirit affect each other. The whole sacramental system is built on the truth that we receive spiritual grace through material things and physical actions. Our specific requirements of fasting are limited — abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent, and a reduction in the quantity of food we eat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. But disciplining our physical bodies for our spiritual well-being does not have to be limited to Lent!

Gold, frankincense and myrrh were indeed valuable gifts for the wise men to present to the Child Jesus. When we look at their symbolism, we can see their relationship to the three notable duties of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. What gifts are we going to offer to Jesus this Lent?

STUDY GROUPS OFFER OPPORTUNITY TO GROW IN UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURES

We all hear the Scripture readings at Sunday Mass. But when studied beforehand, more is revealed in those often simple words — their depth, their richness, and their significance. That’s the idea behind the *Sunday Readings in Context* Scripture study group.

“What people say is that when they get to Mass on Sunday, they have a much, much better understanding of those three readings,” says John D’Isacco, the group leader. “And once people learn the contexts of the readings, they never forget it.”

John has led the group since it met 17 years ago. He was first inspired to organize the group after attending a Promise Keepers Rally in Washington, D.C.

“On my way home, I realized that I had years and years of Scripture studies, but I had never really utilized it,” John says. “So I felt that this is the time for me to share what I’ve been given.”

At first, John wanted the group to be exclusively for lectors, but it was soon opened up to the whole community. And the community has responded — over 300 people have attended the class.

“We take those three readings, analyze them, and put the readings in context — which means looking at what precedes the reading, and what follows the reading,” John says. “Then we think about why those readings have been put together, and we try to get the theme of the day.”

Using Powerpoint presentations, the group focuses on the context of the readings — this might involve examining maps, learning a few new words, or absorbing a timeline to understand where the reading fits within a larger story. Then, the class becomes a group conversation.

“It’s a dialogue,” John says. “I’ll pose provocative questions, and we’ll go around the room and discuss them.”



Another group in our parish community has also been gathering together to break open the Scriptures each week.



The Tuesday Morning Scripture Study group

The *Tuesday Morning Scripture Study* group approaches the Bible in a slightly different way. Instead of focusing on the particular readings for the week’s liturgy, this group decides every fall what books or Biblical themes they would like to study that year. This past year, for example, they have studied the parables, and this spring they will study the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus.

Because they use the Little Rock Scripture Series, the Bible becomes more comprehensible and less overwhelming.

“If you had asked me what I knew about the Bible eight years ago, I would say, ‘Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and that Genesis is at the beginning,’” says Al Fletcher, laughing. “As a boy, I remember carrying my Bible to church and back — but I never really opened it up and read it.”

The Little Rock Scripture Series offers studies of individual books of the Bible as well as the various themes. The members of each group read the Scriptures on their own every day the previous week, and then meet together. During these meetings, the study questions, small group prayer, and faith sharing combine to create a community that supports both Scriptural understanding as well as spiritual growth.

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AMERICAN MARTYRS SCHOOL CELEBRATED CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK JAN. 27-31

Activities included Family Bingo Night, Junior High Leadership Day and Service Day, ending the week with a celebration of the Mass.



STUDY GROUPS *continued from page 4*

Led by group facilitators Barbara Barr and Mary Lou Carnahan, the *Tuesday Morning Scripture Study* Group has also brought parishioners together into closer friendships.

“It’s something that I really enjoy, and we’ve all come to know each other quite well — it’s become almost an extended family,” Al says. “Anybody that wants to come is more than welcome to join us.”

The *Tuesday Morning* group meets from 9:15 a.m. to 11 a.m., and the *Sunday Readings in Context* group

meets Wednesday evenings from 7:30 to 9 p.m. Both groups meet in the Spirituality Center.

To learn more about the *Tuesday Morning Scripture Study*, contact Al Fletcher at 310-379-5241 or tuesmorningscripture@americanmartyrs.org, and to learn more about *Sunday Readings in Context*, contact John D’Isacco at 310-546-1302 or sundayreadings@americanmartyrs.org.

WELL DONE, MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT(S)

by Dennis Labriola

Take a look at Matthew 25:14-30. It is a familiar story about the master of the house leaving the estate and entrusting some ‘talents’ to several of his workers.

A project for our parish school seventh-graders brought that parable into today’s world. At the end of last school year, Msgr. Barry gave each of the soon to be eighth-graders a ‘talent’ with the assignment to ‘multiply’ it and return it to the community over the summer months. Since they couldn’t be given an innate talent such as a musical ability, they were randomly given a small amount of money — \$2, \$5 or \$10. The assignment was to use it to benefit someone else and, if possible, grow it and benefit even more people. They were allowed to work alone or in groups.

The assignment resulted in many great stories about enthusiastic young stewards working together using their God-given talents and the money they were given at the end of the year. Here is one of these stories.

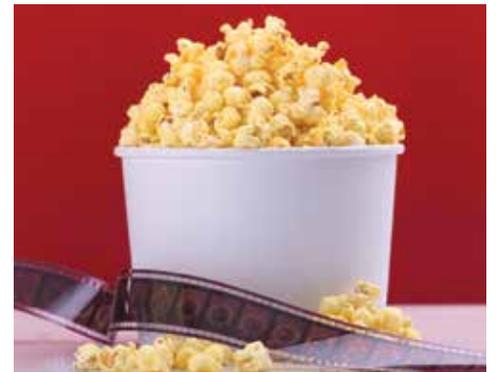
Ben Donohoe and Francis Barrera decided to work together and invited several other students to join them. They wanted to use their money to stage an event that people would donate to attend. So the first thing to do was to decide on the event. The group had now grown to a total of 18 seventh-graders, and of course, everyone had an idea. After a group meeting,

the decision was made to host a family movie night. Now they had to get down to work.

They reserved O’Donnell Hall for the “movie house” and decided on the family-friendly movie *Despicable Me* for the show. But what’s a movie without popcorn, snacks and drinks? This was the first “speed bump” in the road. Their small amount of money couldn’t possibly buy enough refreshments for the crowd they were expecting. So they went to several local retailers, explained what they were doing and asked if they would donate some snacks and drinks. They received positive responses, but were told the retailers needed a letter explaining their project and describing how the funds raised would be used. Being bright, articulate students, this was not a problem and the speed bump was easily overcome.

The next issue was promotion. Spreading the word among friends was the main marketing method, along with some clever flyers. It took about 10 days to pull all of this together, and on movie night, there was a large crowd of children and parents ready to enjoy a movie together.

As a result of the event, the small sum of money given to the 18 seventh-graders had multiplied into \$1,750! The funds were donated to the St. Lawrence of Brindisi sports program.



“It felt good doing this knowing that it would benefit other kids who aren’t as fortunate as us,” Ben says.

Parents of the children agree that it was a great experience.

“It gave them a sense that the world is bigger than just them,” says Ben’s mom, Michelle.

There are other good stewardship stories from the seventh-grade summer project. One involved a refreshment stand on the strand. Proceeds from selling lemonade were used to make care packages for service people overseas. It looks like we have a group of young people well on their way to being good stewards!

We often mistakenly hear that stewardship is all about money. This stewardship story does involve money, but as you think about this narrative of young stewardship in action, please remember these children also used their gifts of time and talent to make a positive impact on others – to bring Christ to others.

FAITH SHARING GROUP GAINS KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING TOGETHER

In the fall of 2013, parishioner Sharon Law launched the Monday Morning Faith Sharing group after she had sponsored a friend through the parish RCIA. During the RCIA meetings, Deacon Derek Brown had used the well-known *Catholicism* DVD series to teach the candidates about the faith, and Sharon realized that she wanted to learn more.

"I thought, 'Every Catholic needs to be exposed to this series, because it teaches us about our faith,'" she says. "So we started with the *Catholicism* DVD series. We use various DVDs on topics such as new evangelization, Catholic spirituality, and God in America. Each week is something different."

The purpose of the group is to bring parishioners together to learn about our Catholic faith through listening to each other and spending time in prayer together.

"Everyone is invited!" Sharon says. "We don't criticize. Everyone has their personal opinion, and we try to respect and honor that and give everyone a safe place to come share, ask questions, and ultimately to grow in our personal faith."

While Sharon leads the group, there is room for everyone to raise questions, or bring up topics that they would like to learn more about. Sharon encourages sharing and discussion, as she believes that is the key to growing in knowledge and understanding of our faith.

"We gather, pray together, and watch a DVD," she says. "Then we have some questions that I prepare, and it's pretty much open discussion and faith sharing after that. This helps us to enrich our faith and we learn from one another. By gathering in a group, you learn so much more through others and through sharing."

"I want to help parishioners to grow closer to Christ — to expand their spiritual life, their understanding of Catholicism, and what it means to be Catholic," Sharon says. "It is so important to gather and pray in community, and to learn more about our faith."



Monday Morning Faith Sharing Group Coordinator Sharon Law

Sharon points out that as people learn and grow in knowledge after attending a few meetings, their confidence grows. She can see the positive effects the group has had on fellow parishioners and how it has changed their lives.

"As we learn together, we become more grounded in our faith," Sharon says. "This group helps you to become more equipped with knowledge and understanding that then enriches your life. You grow in your faith and it affects everything from your family, to how you interact at work, etc. It helps you be a better Christian."

There are currently about a dozen group members who come to the meetings each week, and the group is hoping to expand in the new year. They are always happy to welcome new members, and Sharon believes everyone has something to learn.

"Our spirituality and faith is a continuous, lifetime journey, and there is always more to learn," she says. "I think everyone should get involved!"

The Faith Sharing group, which meets every Monday from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. in the Spirituality Center, is designed to be an easygoing, welcoming group for anyone looking to grow in their faith journey.

For more information on the Monday Morning Faith Sharing group, or if you have any questions, please contact Sharon Law by phone at 310-963-9484, or via email at sharon582@verizon.net.

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LENT PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES *continued from front cover*

combination with the other courses through Dive-In. Following Dive-In, Fr. Richard Leonard, S.J. will return to speak on March 20.

This Lent, as in years past, we continue our Together in Mission for the poorest parishes and schools of our archdiocese. This annual appeal is a perfect way for all of us to express our solidarity with our sisters and brothers who need us to help keep the doors of their churches and schools open so that there is a safe place to pray, play and learn. If we work together, we can make a huge impact on the lives of these great people and the priests, principals and staff who stretch to serve them. This is the almsgiving that Our Lord asks of us and the implementation of the social justice aspect of our faith.

As you read this Our Faith in Action, say a prayer for the generous people whose ministries are profiled and when you see them, thank them for using their gifts. They are the Church in action — the ones who keep the doors of our hearts open and shelter us against the complacency and lethargy that can allow the winter cold to challenge the new growth of spring.

In Christ,



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

Our Faith in Action is provided by the American Martyrs Stewardship Commission

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., 12:10 p.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.