

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

The Gift of Lent

It's that time again. Wednesday, we will line up to have our foreheads dabbed with ash. "Remember you are dust and to dust you will return."

We will skip meat on Fridays and give up something, anything, to show our penitence. Chocolate? Ice Cream? What can we offer?

We can give, as well as give up.

A friend of mine, the writer Elizabeth Scalia, had some sage advice, which she posted on her blog, "The Anchoress."

During these difficult times when uncertainty is in the air, Scalia said the most important quality we can possess is trust—and with that, a generous heart:

Consider making a charitable donation—however small—to the sorts of organizations that anyone can turn to in time of need. Bring some food to your local food pantry, regardless of what church it's at—bring a small bag every week, if you can, of just a few items; pasta, beans, tuna, diapers, even toilet paper and feminine products.

If you can, while you can, put an extra fiver in the collection plate—that's like 70 cents a day, and it will help them to help others when people start turning up needing help with their bills, or with putting gas in the car to go to work (or to go look for work). If you have the ability to make a larger gift, make it now, while you can. God will not be outdone in generosity.

If—unlike anyone I know—you have the means to do something like this, yes do it; don't forget those people who truly serve all of us, and the whole world, with their constant prayers.

I like that thought: "God will not be outdone in generosity." And I like the prevailing sense of optimism that it displays. We can give, as well as give up—and as the famous prayer reminds us, it is in giving that we receive.

We might look at these coming weeks not just as a period of sacrifice, but also as one of selflessness. It is a time for looking inward, and for reaching outward. Maybe the greatest sacrifice we can make is of ourselves—our time, our treasure, our talent.

Elizabeth Scalia's suggestions are a good starting point. And maybe we can challenge ourselves in the days to come. What do we have that others need? What do we possess that we can share? What hardship can we endure to make others' hardships easier to bear?

The need is great, and growing. How will we meet it?

Lent is a gift to us—a moment in time to reconsider ourselves, our relationship with God, our place in the fulfillment of His plans. We are given this opportunity every year to take a personal inventory. We can take time to restock the empty shelves of our souls—those things that we may be lacking. Do we have enough prayer? Enough simplicity? Humility? Are we running low on love?

We have some precious time to repent and replenish. We've been given something precious for these few weeks. What are we going to give in return?

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STATIONS OF THE CROSS

"Praying the Stations with Mary, the Mother of Jesus"

Fridays during Lent, at 7:30 p.m., followed by Benediction