

## Observe Lent with prayer, fasting, alms

As we begin the season of Lent, I want to wish you many blessings during this holy period and express the hope that we will pray for one another in the weeks ahead.

I hope that we can all be especially mindful of our catechumen sisters and brothers, who are preparing for baptism at the Easter Vigil. This will be a time in which they will intensify and draw to deeper focus a process that has been unfolding within them and among them for some time.

You can imagine their excitement as they anticipate being immersed in the water of baptism so that they might share the life of the Risen Christ.

In like fashion, we need to pray for our candidate sisters and brothers who, already baptized, seek to enter into full communion with our faith community.

With the newly baptized, they will receive Holy Communion and confirmation. They, too, have opened their hearts to the Lord's call and have prepared carefully for some time.

Next week I shall have the joy of presiding at five Rites of Election. Three of them will be at Sacred Heart Cathedral, the others at St. Alphonsus, Auburn, and St. Mary, Corning. This is the time when we formally elect our friends as candidates for the Easter sacraments.

### along the way

By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



I always look forward to these celebrations. The people who come to them are excited and filled with anticipation about the challenge of Lent and the joy of Easter. This is a time not only for our catechumens and candidates, but also for those who have accompanied them to this point through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

These wonderful people communicate great joy and enthusiasm. They are also living reminders of the call we all share during this Lenten season to prepare well for the Easter feast. In the words of the Ash Wednesday ritual we are asked to "Repent and believe the Gospel."

There are many ways, I suppose, in which we can interpret that call and respond to it in daily life. But, ultimately it means to turn our hearts back to God from habits or attitudes or values that lead to death rather than life, confuse

rather than clarify, burden rather than set us free.

Part of the challenge of the season is to be still enough to hear the quiet voice of God amid the clatter and confusion that can so easily invade our daily routines. I know realizing that inner quiet is not easy in my own life. I expect that it is not easy for your either. But I am so convinced that it is very much worth our effort to do what we can to achieve it.

Lent suggests three classic ways to remind ourselves of the values that give life, clarify and free. Those ways are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. All speak to ordering relationships through which we grow as human beings and contribute to the growth of others. Prayer draws us to be aware of our relationship with God; fasting, to our sense of stewardship over our own bodies and our possessions; almsgiving to our relationship to our neighbors.

Each in its own way draws us away from the self-centeredness of our own designs and opens us to a fresh appreciation of the many sources of new life around us.

As we pray for our catechumens and candidates during this Lenten season, I hope that we can pray for one another with great affection so that all of us will prepare well for the Easter feast.

Peace to all.

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