

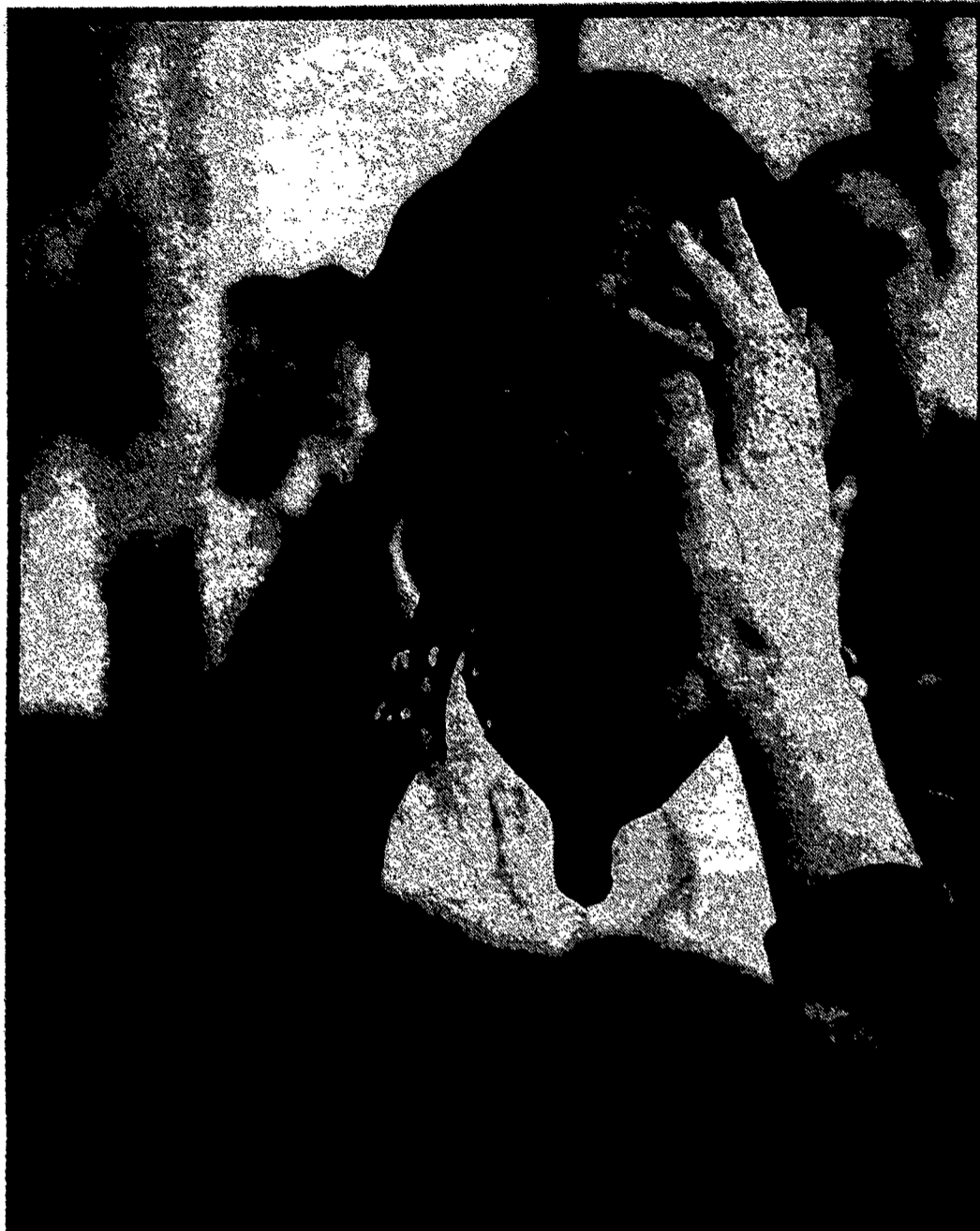
DOWN ON THE

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The Lenten season:

Many
ways to
grow
and
change



All Saints Catholic Academy student Krystin Blunt, 13, receives ashes from religion teacher Sister Karlien Bach, RSM, on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 13, at St. Theodore's Church in Gates.

For many Catholics, the word "no" probably pops up quite often as they map out their Lenten sacrifices: No candy. No dessert. No television. No meat on Fridays or Ash Wednesday.

Yet Michael Haller has learned through his education at Gates' All Saints Academy that Lent is also a "yes" season, so to speak.

"When you're younger, the emphasis is on what you cannot do. Nowadays, it's what you can do to make a difference — for God, for the community," said Michael, 14, an eighth-grader at All Saints and parishioner at St. Helen's in Gates.

One example is an annual school-wide project in which All Saints seventh- and eighth-graders collect pennies throughout Lent, and the proceeds are forwarded to missions in Florida that serve migrant farmworker families. Last year the pennies added up to more than \$3,400, or nearly 7,000 rolls of pennies. In addition, this Lent many of the All Saints students are volunteering at soup kitchens.

Father Daniel Holland recently gave All Saints students some extra Lenten food for thought, noting that fasting can mean more than giving up candy: "You can also fast from bad language and cruel jokes. You can fast from apathy — 'Oh, do I have to?' 'Oh, ask someone else.' 'Oh, I don't want to do it.'"

"Apathy means refusing to use the gifts God has given us to help others," Father Holland told the students during a Feb. 13 Ash Wednesday service at St. Theodore's Church, where he is pastor.

Father Holland also pointed out that fasting can bring positive results: If one person fasts from television and this causes the rest of the family to leave the TV off, this might result in quality family time that otherwise wouldn't have occurred, he observed.

Father Holland told the students that Lent — through its three main principles of prayer, fasting and charity — is a chance for "getting rid of the clutter and planting new seeds" in our lives. And in an opening announcement for the Ash Wednesday service, Nick Borkowski, 12, told his fellow students, "There are many ways to grow and change and become the devoted disciples Jesus wants us to be."

Nick, a seventh-grader, later told the *Catholic Courier* that some of these ways are: greater involvement in parish activities (he belongs to St. John the Evangelist in Spencerport); trying to think before acting or speaking; and asking, "What Would Jesus Do?" The greater the challenge the better, he added.

"How much would you want to give up for God, when he was willing to give up his only son?" Nick asked.

"I think God's really asking us to show we love him by giving up, for those 40 days, things we don't need to get to heaven," added Pat Donohue, 13, who attends Rochester's St. Stanislaus Church and is a youth-group member at Irondequoit's St. Thomas the Apostle.

Colleen Echter, 13, an eighth-grader at All Saints, agreed that Lenten sacrifice should involve "what you can do to make your relationship with God better."

Pat said he attempts to pray more

during Lent, especially by attending Stations of the Cross on many Fridays with his family. That is also a key part of the Lenten season at Holy Cross Church in Charlotte, where Donna Jacobi, youth minister, said groups of young people pray the Stations of the Cross every Friday afternoon and evening. The Holy Cross youths also conduct an annual Lenten soup supper that raises funds for the poor, as well as an Easter-basket project for disadvantaged children who attend nearby St. Joseph's Villa.

Such a full range of activities, Jacobi noted, can be more challenging than simply fasting. "At our regular youth-group meetings, we ask, 'What are you going to do?' A lot of times, I think it's harder to do something extra than to give up something," she commented.

According to Michael, all these Lenten observances can spark a deep personal transformation that extends well beyond Easter.

"I'm trying to really grasp what Lent is. It's a very complex season — a season of reflection on your own weaknesses. It takes time," he said.

Colleen, a parishioner at Rochester's Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, agrees that this process should not be confined to the Lenten season.

"It takes a lifetime to change yourself," she said.