

Dear GOF families,

It is difficult to believe we are in the second semester of school and spring is just around the corner! Even more shocking is that Lent is only 3 weeks away! We will be having another Mardi Gras party on Tuesday, February 21st. It will begin with Mass at 5:30pm followed by a potluck meal and games and activities.

Since the new year is in full swing now, it may be a good time to take a look at family goals for the year. What do you think will bring you, as a family, closer to Christ this year? What will help you be the "best version of yourself?" How about adding some family prayer time in the evenings, blessing the children with holy water before bed, attending a weekday Mass, learning about some of the saints as their feast days come up, reading bible stories to the kids or reading scripture together? These are just a few ideas. The possibilities are endless! It is time that we give God more of ourselves in this secular culture so we don't lose our focus of gaining Heaven someday!

This month in GOF we will be talking about fasting. Immediate thoughts of bread and water turn many people away. A bread and water fast is certainly one fast a person could undertake, but fasting includes so much more. We can fast from activities like watching TV, some computer time, cell phones, ipods; fast from behaviors that pull us away from God like whining, self pity, angry outbursts, sloth, selfishness, disobedience. If you think God is calling you to fast from food, it could be as simple as having no salt with a meal or not taking second helpings. If you would like to try fasting on bread and water, you can also try that. Just remember that fasting isn't about what we are doing, it is an offering to God for reparation, conversion or an intention. Most importantly, however, is that fasting must be saturated in prayer so the graces from God can more freely flow in and through us.

In the packet this month, there is a calendar for the month with the Holy Father's intentions, the saints' feast days and prayers. I would also encourage each family to take advantage of donating to this backpack program that Jeannie talked about. This is a way to teach our children that there are people in our community that need our help. By doing something like this, it helps us to put the corporal work of mercy "Feed the hungry" into practice. Anything that we can do that is concrete with our children helps them to understand these works of mercy that we are called to as Catholics. There is a paper bag stapled to the back of the packet specifically for this purpose. I've also included the Holy Father's Lenten Message from 2009 because it is about fasting which is our topic for the month.

On a few housekeeping notes: Be sure to look at the sign up sheet each month to see what your family has signed up to do. If you have questions about what your job entails, please ask me. Please be gracious in filling up the empty spots that are left as well. If you have signed up to provide the main dish, it is also your responsibility to make sure drinks are set out and table ware is set up so after Mass, people can begin to eat right away. GOF belongs to all of us and it is our responsibility to make sure things run smoothly.

Remember to bring any items you would like to have blessed to the GOF Mass and Father Pete will bless those items following Mass! Keep in mind that God cannot be outdone in generosity.....so jump in where you are! Your efforts will be rewarded!

February, 2012 - Overview for the Month

The month of February is dedicated to the **Holy Family**. The first three and a half weeks of February fall within the liturgical season of **Ordinary Time** which is represented by the liturgical color green. Green, the symbol of hope, is the color of the sprouting seed and arouses in the faithful the hope of reaping the eternal harvest of heaven, especially the hope of a glorious resurrection. The remaining days of February are the beginning of **Lent**. The liturgical color changes to purple — a symbol of penance, mortification and the sorrow of a contrite heart.

The Holy Father's Intentions for the Month of February 2012

General: That all peoples may have access to water and other resources needed for daily life.

Missionary: That the Lord may sustain the efforts of health workers assisting the sick and elderly in the world's poorest regions. (See also www.apostleshipofprayer.net)

Feasts for February

The feasts on the General Roman Calendar celebrated during the month of February are:

2. Presentation of the Lord, *Feast*
3. Blaise; Ansgar, *Opt. Mem.*
5. Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, *Sunday*
6. Paul Miki and Companions, *Memorial*
8. Jerome Emiliani; Josephine Bakhita, *Opt. Mem.*
10. Scholastica, *Memorial*
11. Our Lady of Lourdes, *Opt. Mem.*
12. Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, *Sunday*
14. Cyril and Methodius, *Memorial*
17. Seven Founders of the Orders of Servites, *Opt. Mem.*
19. Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, *Sunday*
21. Peter Damian; Fat Tuesday, *Opt. Mem.*
23. Polycarp of Smyrna, *Memorial*
26. First Sunday of Lent, *Sunday*

Focus of the Liturgy

The Gospel readings for the Sundays in February are taken from St. Mark and are from Year B Cycle 2 of the readings.

February 5th - Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time	The Gospel is about miracles our Lord worked — including healing Peter's mother-in-law.
February 12th - Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time	The Gospel is about Christ healing a leper.
February 19th - Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time	The Gospel is about the paralytic being healed by Christ.

Jesus is tempted by the devil in the desert.



Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
I give you my heart and
my soul.

Highlights

February 2 Presentation of the Lord

This feast is a festival of light. The procession, in which the blessed candles are carried by clergy and faithful, recalls by its symbolism the manifestation of Christ, the Light of the world, received in the temple. "A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."



Recipe of the Month Heart Cakes

St. Valentine's Day is a joyful feast, and there's no better way to observe it than by exchanging sweet, heart-shaped confections.



Activity of the Month



Candlemas Ceremony

The family, who with lighted candles goes in spirit to the Temple with our Lady, will learn a wonderful lesson of her humility.

Symbols St. Polycarp



The bishop of Smyrna was condemned to death by

February 26th - First Sunday of
Lent

Highlights of the Month

The month of February is traditionally dedicated to the Holy Family. Between the events which marked Christmas and the beginning of Christ's public life the Church has seen fit to recall the example of the Holy Family for the emulation of the Christian family.

The Feast of the **Presentation** (February 2) or **Candlemas** forms a fitting transition from Christmas to Easter. The small Christ-Child is still in His Mother's arms, but already she is offering Him in sacrifice. February 21, Shrove Tuesday, will find us preparing for **Ash Wednesday**.

The saints that we will focus on this month and try to imitate are **St. Blaise** (February 3), **St. Paul Miki & Companions** (February 6), **St. Jerome Emiliani and St. Josephine Bakhita** (February 8), **St. Scholastica** (February 10), **Our Lady of Lourdes** (February 11), **Sts. Cyril and Methodius** (February 14), **Seven Founders of the Orders of Servites** (February 17), **Peter Damian** (February 22) and **St. Polycarp** (February 23).

The feast of **St. Agatha** (February 5), will not be celebrated this year because it is superseded by Sunday. **The Chair of St. Peter** (February 22) falls on Ash Wednesday this year.

From Feast to Fast



Though the shortest month of the year, February is rich in Liturgical activity, for it typically begins in one Liturgical Season (Ordinary Time), ends in another (Lent), and contains a feast (Presentation of our Lord) that bridges two other seasons (Christmas and Easter)! In addition, the faithful may receive in February three of the four major public sacramentals that the Church confers during the liturgical year: blessed candles, the blessing of throats and blessed ashes.

The Solemnity of the **Presentation of the Lord** on February 2nd harkens back to the Christmas mystery of

Light except that now, Christ, the helpless babe, is "the Light of Revelation to the Gentiles who will save his people from their sins." Candles, symbolizing Christ our Light, will be carried in procession this day, as will be the Paschal candle during the Easter Vigil Liturgy.

"The Light of Revelation" shines more brightly with each successive Sunday of Ordinary Time, until its magnificence – exposing our sinfulness and need for conversion – propels us into the penitential Season of Lent. We accept the cross of blessed ashes on Ash Wednesday (February 22) and plunge ourselves into the major exercises of Lent – fasting, prayer, almsgiving – laying our thoughts and prayers on the heart of our Mother Mary. She, who offered her Son in the temple and on the Cross, will teach us how to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow after her Son.



burning. The flames refused to do their task, billowing about like sails, exposing the bishop's figure in a radiant light. A soldier used his spear to end the spectacle.

St. Scholastica



The sister of St. Benedict, and founder of a Benedictine convent not far from Monte Cassino. It is related that St. Benedict had a vision of a dove rising just before he received word of her death.

St. Agatha



During the Decian persecution, St. Agatha, a Sicilian of noble birth, died under torture rather than break her vow of lifelong consecration to Christ.

St. Dorothy



The patroness of gardens is particularly well known in the little villages of southern Europe. Her feast is locally celebrated on Feb. 6. The symbol is descriptive of her zeal for the Faith.



"Jesus, who hast made Thyself obedient to Thy parents, to Thee be ever glory, with the supreme Father and with the Spirit."

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Pope Benedicts' Lenten Message: A Call to Fasting

By Pope Benedict XVI

2/21/2009

Catholic Online (www.catholic.org)

Fasting represents an important ascetical practice, a spiritual arm to do battle against every possible disordered attachment to ourselves..

ROME (Catholic Online) - As we enter into the 40 Day season of Lent and are called to a deepening conversion of life and transformation of lifestyle, we offer to all of our readers and viewers the message which the Holy See has released for Lent, 2009. Pope Benedict XVI has specifically emphasized the Lenten practice of fasting. He has asked all of the faithful to enter into its' meaning and experience by doing it and thereby encountering its redemptive power.

We pledge ourselves - and invite all of our readers and viewers - to pray and fast this Lent for our dear Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI. Let us ask that this Servant of the Servants of God would, during these forty days of Lent, experience great graces from the Lord Jesus Christ as he guides His Holy Church:

He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry" (Mt 4,1-2)

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

At the beginning of Lent, which constitutes an itinerary of more intense spiritual training, the Liturgy sets before us again three penitential practices that are very dear to the biblical and Christian tradition – prayer, almsgiving, fasting – to prepare us to better celebrate Easter and thus experience God's power that, as we shall hear in the Paschal Vigil, "dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy, casts out hatred, brings us peace and humbles earthly pride" (Paschal Præconium).

For this year's Lenten Message, I wish to focus my reflections especially on the value and meaning of fasting. Indeed, Lent recalls the forty days of our Lord's fasting in the desert, which He undertook before entering into His public ministry. We read in the Gospel: "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry" (Mt 4,1-2). Like Moses, who fasted before receiving the tablets of the Law (cf. Ex 34,28) and Elijah's fast before meeting the Lord on Mount Horeb (cf. 1 Kings 19,8), Jesus, too, through prayer and fasting, prepared Himself for the mission that lay before Him, marked at the start by a serious battle with the tempter.

the new Law and compendium of the entire Gospel (cf. Mt 22, 34-40).

The faithful practice of fasting contributes, moreover, to conferring unity to the whole person, body and soul, helping to avoid sin and grow in intimacy with the Lord. Saint Augustine, who knew all too well his own negative impulses, defining them as “twisted and tangled knottiness” (Confessions, II, 10.18), writes: “I will certainly impose privation, but it is so that he will forgive me, to be pleasing in his eyes, that I may enjoy his delightfulness” (Sermo 400, 3, 3: PL 40, 708). Denying material food, which nourishes our body, nurtures an interior disposition to listen to Christ and be fed by His saving word. Through fasting and praying, we allow Him to come and satisfy the deepest hunger that we experience in the depths of our being: the hunger and thirst for God.

At the same time, fasting is an aid to open our eyes to the situation in which so many of our brothers and sisters live. In his First Letter, Saint John admonishes: “If anyone has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, yet shuts up his bowels of compassion from him – how does the love of God abide in him?” (3,17). Voluntary fasting enables us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who bends low and goes to the help of his suffering brother (cf. Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, 15). By freely embracing an act of self-denial for the sake of another, we make a statement that our brother or sister in need is not a stranger. It is precisely to keep alive this welcoming and attentive attitude towards our brothers and sisters that I encourage the parishes and every other community to intensify in Lent the custom of private and communal fasts, joined to the reading of the Word of God, prayer and almsgiving. From the beginning, this has been the hallmark of the Christian community, in which special collections were taken up (cf. 2 Cor 8-9; Rm 15, 25-27), the faithful being invited to give to the poor what had been set aside from their fast (Didascalia Ap., V, 20,18). This practice needs to be rediscovered and encouraged again in our day, especially during the liturgical season of Lent.

From what I have said thus far, it seems abundantly clear that fasting represents an important ascetical practice, a spiritual arm to do battle against every possible disordered attachment to ourselves. Freely chosen detachment from the pleasure of food and other material goods helps the disciple of Christ to control the appetites of nature, weakened by original sin, whose negative effects impact the entire human person. Quite opportunely, an ancient hymn of the Lenten liturgy exhorts: “Utamur ergo parcius, / verbis cibis et potibus, / somno, iocis et arctius / perstemus in custodia – Let us use sparingly words, food and drink, sleep and amusements. May we be more alert in the custody of our senses.”

Dear brothers and sisters, it is good to see how the ultimate goal of fasting is to help each one of us, as the Servant of God Pope John Paul II wrote, to make the complete gift of self to God (cf. Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, 21). May every family and Christian community use well this time of Lent, therefore, in order to cast aside all that distracts the spirit and grow in whatever nourishes the soul, moving it to love of God and neighbor. I am thinking especially of a greater commitment to prayer, *lectio divina*, recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and active participation in the Eucharist, especially the Holy Sunday Mass. With this interior disposition, let us enter the penitential spirit of Lent.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Causa nostrae laetitiae*, accompany and support us in the effort to free our heart from slavery to sin, making it evermore a “living tabernacle of God.” With these wishes, while assuring every believer and ecclesial community of my prayer for a fruitful Lenten journey, I cordially impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

Lessons for the Sunday Gospels

These reflections and ideas may be copied for use with your classes and families.

February 5
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time
 Mark 1:29-39

Reflecting

We like to be liked, don't we. It feels great to be liked. God made us to be happy and to enjoy the company and attention of those who like us and want to be with us. It's all good.

But it's very easy to get caught up in being with people we like and doing things that we enjoy doing together, while forgetting to do what God intends us to do.

In today's Gospel, Jesus shows us how even he had to be very careful not to get so caught up with his friends that he neglects doing what his Father asks of him. He finishes teaching at the synagogue, visits Simon, heals Simon's mother-in-law, and heals lots of other people in the town. Then he knows he needs time to pray, so he goes off by himself.

But his friends come and get him and tell him that "Everyone is looking for you." Now if you were to hear that "everyone is looking for you," you'd probably be pretty excited; you'd want to get back to being with those looking for you. Jesus, though, says, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come."

Jesus is committed to God and to doing God's will. He never forgets his "purpose," even when other things tempt him away from that focus. When we are tempted away from our mission to love and serve God by loving and serving others, we can remember this story about Jesus.

Sharing Ideas

What tempts us to neglect our mission to love and serve God by loving and serving others? (Responses might include "too busy," "too tired," "lack of caring.")

Acting

Draft a Statement of Purpose using Jesus' words. Write "For this purpose have I come" at the top of a piece of paper, and then list things that state why you are a Catholic Christian.

Praying

Jesus, you teach us with your words and actions. Thank you for showing us how to stay focused on our purpose to follow you. Amen.

February 12
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
 Mark 1:40-45

Reflecting

In today's Gospel, a person with leprosy comes to Jesus and asks to be healed. Jesus heals the person—and teaches us a very important lesson. We learn to see all human beings as children of God. Everyone is acceptable to God. Like Jesus, we are to reach out to all people with the love and compassion of God. Maybe we think we do this already. After all, we're good people. We don't hurt others. We help others when we can.

But the lesson in today's Gospel is about more than being a good person or reaching out to help others. It's about accepting and reaching out to others *who are not liked or accepted by others*.

We can better understand this challenge if we understand just how

much of an outcast a person with the disease of leprosy was in Jesus' day. They were considered unclean and so were isolated from the entire community—even their families. To have an exchange with a person with leprosy was completely forbidden. But Jesus doesn't care about what is "forbidden." More than anything else, he cares about people—all people.

Who are the outcasts today? Well, today's outcasts might be those who are called names like "weird" or "clueless" or "stupid" or "stuck up"; those on our team who are clumsy and not very good at the sport; or those who don't wear cool clothes or who have bad complexions.

So now can you see how challenging Jesus' lesson is in today's Gospel?

Sharing Ideas

Why is it hard to be friends with a person if most of our friends don't like that person?

Acting

As a class, write a prayer asking Jesus to give you the courage and love to accept and reach out to *all* people.

Praying

Pray the prayer you wrote in Acting.

February 19
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time
 Mark 2:1-12

Reflecting

Today's Gospel is about four people making a hole in the roof of a building so they can lower their friend—a person who is paralyzed—through the hole to "get near Jesus." Jesus sees the faith of these men and forgives

heal our bodies and our souls. Thank you for your wondrous love. Amen.

February 26
1st Sunday of Lent
Mark 1:12-15

Reflecting

Last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. During the next six weeks, we will pay close attention to our relationship with Jesus. We will pray deeply, by ourselves and with others, so that we grow closer to Jesus. We will give up some things (called "fasting") so that in doing without, we are reminded of how much we need Jesus. And we will give what we have to others (called "almsgiving") so that our hearts learn more about what Jesus taught us to do: love!

Now we do all of these things every day of our lives, don't we. So we might wonder why we need a special season to pray, fast, and give alms.

Today's Gospel helps us understand what the season of Lent is all about. After Jesus spends 40 days in the desert, during which time he is tempted by Satan and then is ministered to by angels, he goes to Galilee and preaches: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

During the next six weeks, we, too, will be tempted—as Jesus was. During the next six weeks, we, too, will know the nearness of angels, as Jesus did. And when we gather with our faith community on Easter to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, we will be ready to better understand what Jesus preached when he left the desert behind and went to Galilee:

"The kingdom of God is at hand."

Sharing Ideas

Why is it important to prepare to celebrate special occasions? Why is it especially important to prepare ourselves to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus?

Acting

Sit quietly and make a list of three things you will do during Lent—one that has to do with praying, one that has to do with fasting, and one that has to do with giving alms. Put the list in an envelope and place the envelope on your prayer table.

Praying

Jesus, you are our Savior. May we be faithful to our Lenten intentions so that we grow closer to you, learn about love, and rejoice when we celebrate your Resurrection. Amen.

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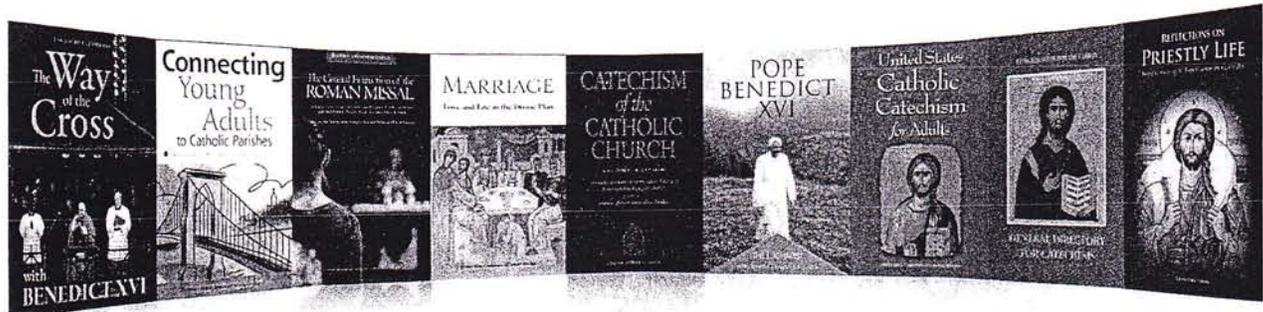
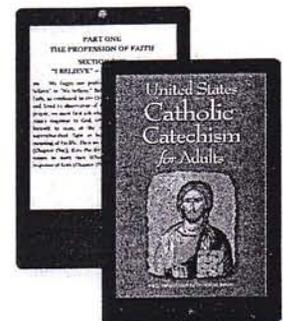
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<p>February 5 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time Our purpose is the same as Jesus': to love and serve.</p>	<p>February 12 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time Jesus challenges us to reach out to everyone.</p>	<p>February 19 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time Jesus shows that God's love heals the body and the soul.</p>	<p>February 26 1st Sunday of Lent Lent deepens our faith and helps us grow closer to Jesus.</p>
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the sins of the man who is paralyzed. Then he heals the man so he can pick up his mat and walk. People are amazed at this incident and they glorify God.

Does it seem like more details might help us better understand the message of today's Gospel? For example, why do the five friends—the man who is paralyzed and the four men who carry him—want to see Jesus in the first place? Had they heard about Jesus' mercy and wisdom and so wanted to see him and hear him for themselves? Did they seek out Jesus to be forgiven or to benefit from his healing powers? Or maybe

they just wanted to see Jesus so they could boast to their families that they got to see this popular teacher and healer.

Well, having more information about all these things doesn't actually help us better understand the message of the Gospel. In this incident, we see Jesus' power to forgive sins and to heal the human body, and when others see these powers they are "astounded and glorified God."

That's the message! Jesus' mission is to reveal God, for Jesus is the Son of God. In everything he does and says, Jesus shows us that God loves the entire person—body and soul. As

followers of Jesus, we know we are loved completely and unconditionally, body and soul.

Sharing Ideas

We know lots of things that can make a body sick and in need of healing. What things make a soul sick and in need of healing?

Acting

Pretend to be neighbors of the man who is healed in today's Gospel. What does he say to you about his experience?

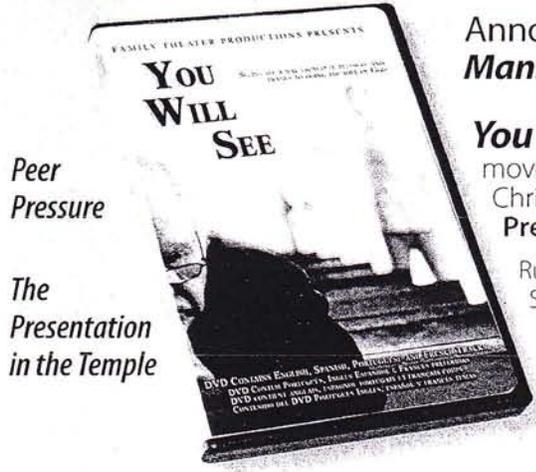
Praying

Loving and compassionate God, you

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