

Pastor's Ponderings . . .

The month of February is usually a depressing time of the year for me. Is it for you? We have had some freezing temperatures and snow and many dark and gloomy days. I long for the sun and for any kind of light to help break up the physical darkness and also the darkness of the human condition that is so evident during this month. Human nature is so weak, vulnerable and exposed as is all of creation. We battle sickness, flu, dying and death.

In the past, the month of February has taught me that death normally comes in threes. Relationships can be strained. Pressures can mount. Worries and fears are overwhelming. There is a natural let down after the Christmas rush and for many people "surviving winter" is their most important concern. Oh where is the light that shines through the darkness of winter? What possibly can warm a hardened, frozen, stony, broken or hurting heart?

Like some people who are able to flee winter's hardships by going to the warmth of Florida or to the west coast, all of us are able to search for glimpses of heaven that will bring the proper light to the darkness of winter for us. We have celebrated the liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas and we believe deeply that a light has come into our darkness and has truly conquered it. We believe that this light is the very presence of Jesus Christ. Especially in dark times, it is important for us to seek out this light; welcome the Lord more into our lives; trust in his love, care and presence; walk with him through the darkness, follow his lead; count on his encouragement, support and strength; keep the faith, keep believing and praying; live with the love of Christ, step out with his mercy and forgiveness and share his presence with others. This saving grace is our light that can never be extinguished.

There was an e-mail exercise that encouraged the recipients to send an encouraging Bible verse to the person on the top of the list. The idea was that many encouraging Bible verses would eventually return to you. The verse is supposed to be a favorite one that lifts your spirits during challenging times. Are there particular Bible verses that can encourage us during this dark month of winter and shed the light of God's presence, grace and love upon us?

Here are some of my favorites: "I will not leave you orphaned." "I am with you always." "Be not afraid." "Have no fear." "Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome and I will refresh you." "Is there no one here to condemn you, then neither will I." "Unless you forgive..." "Love one another." "The

Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want." "Get behind me, Satan." "God is love." "I was thirsty and you gave me to drink." "I will rejoice over you." "Today you will be with me in Paradise." "Untie him and let him go free." "Lazarus, come out!" "...and he began to wash his disciples' feet." "This treasure we possess in earthen vessels..." "We are afflicted in every way possible but we are not crushed; full of doubts, we never despair. We are persecuted but never abandoned; we are struck down but never destroyed." What bible verses bring you hope, break up the darkness and give you light?



A friend of mine was really afraid of the dark when he was a child and he was really afraid to go down stairs into the basement because it was so dark. One day his mother asked him to go into the basement to get some food that she had canned. He refused to the surprise of his mother and he confessed that he was afraid of the dark. His father overheard the conversation. He told the boy to follow him to the basement stairway and he asked the boy to watch what happened when he opened the basement door. The father asked his son if the darkness from the basement left the basement and came into the kitchen and made the kitchen dark or did light from the kitchen go into the basement and bring light to the basement. It was obvious to the boy that the light from the kitchen went into the basement. The Father explained that darkness cannot move but light can. Light can cover darkness and the boy didn't have to be afraid of the dark anymore because there would always be a trail of light for him to find his way.

Jesus is the Word of God made flesh and he is the Light of the World. As his words live in our flesh and dwell in our hearts, then there is always hope, light and encouragement for us and we are hope light and encouragement for others no matter how dark our world and our lives become. No matter how dark our world gets, we are always covered with the light of God's saving grace and love. We need not fear any kind of darkness anymore.

Ash Wednesday is February 14, the beginning of the Holy Season of Lent. We remember that there is no dying without new life; no dying without resurrection. The paschal mystery will always lead to eternal glory, life and light. Let us pray that our personal sacrifices and acts of mercy will bring God's saving presence to the



St. Leo's Prayer Wall is a place where all, regardless of age, race or creed, are invited to sing God's praises, give Him thanks, and/or call upon His presence for help in times of need. The wall, a place of prayer for all peoples (much like the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem), captures the faces of the community, as well as peacemakers and saints who have inspired us through the ages.



The Wall is a place for staff and volunteers, youth groups, community meetings, and for individuals who pass through our parking lot on the way to work, school, etc., to pray, reflect and pause. We invite you to share in this special way of prayer, joy, and thanksgiving. Praise God!

God cares about every need in your life and knows what you need even before you ask Him for help. Our St. Leo the Great parish community promises to remember you in our private prayer, as well as in our communal prayer, which is to say that we are praying for you all the time.

All prayer requests are held in strictest confidence. **Send your prayer request to:** Saint Leo the Great Church, 2573 Saint Leo Place, Cincinnati, OH 45225. You can also submit your prayer request online at: <http://saint-leo/WorksofMercy/PrayerWallMinistry.aspx>.