

Third Week of Lent



Blessing for a Place of Prayer

Loving God,
since the beginning of creation
you have never failed to be with
your people.
In the Ark of the Covenant,
you joined them in their desert
wanderings.
In a Virgin's womb,
you came to live with us
and die for us.
Come now, loving God;
dwell in us as we pray in this place,
and make us a people of prayer in
every place.
Bless us with your peace,
and bless all who seek you.
Come and make your home
in our hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

March 15, 2009 Zeal for Your House

In today's Gospel reading (John 2:13–25), the disciples see Jesus throwing the moneychangers out of the temple, and they are reminded of verse 9 from Psalm 69, "It is zeal for your house that has consumed me . . ." Do we have zeal for sacred spaces? In the ancient world, mountain tops were sacred places where heaven and earth met. The Ten Commandments we heard read in today's First Reading from Exodus (20:1–17) were given to Moses by God on the top of Mount Sinai. In Jerusalem, the temple was the divine dwelling where God lived in the midst of his people. It was the center of Jewish religious life, but it was also the center of Jewish civic, economic, and social

life. To have zeal for the temple was to be passionate about God and the people of God. If God is the center of our lives, then prayer needs a place in our lives. If Jesus is the meeting place of heaven and earth, we need to make room for him in our hearts and homes. Creating and using a sacred place of prayer in our homes can center our family life by giving God a central place. Create a prayer place by using a small room, the corner of a room, or by setting up a home altar. Be passionate about your prayer place. Don't let clutter intrude. Decorate it with fresh flowers and pictures of your spiritual heroes.

This Week at Home

Monday, March 16

Lenten Desert

The prayer traditions of Lent help us to journey into the desert to be with our God. The desert is a place free of distractions. There are no TVs in the desert, no computer games, or shopping malls. There is only silence, space, beauty, and peace. Like the Jewish people in their desert wandering, we may not like the discomfort and inconvenience of the desert; we may prefer to be slaves to distractions rather than enter the unfamiliar freedom the desert offers. But this Lent, if we give ourselves to the desert, we can be very sure that God will give himself to us. How can you create a little desert in your life this Lent? In addition to creating a place of prayer, set aside times for prayer. Decide times when the television and computer will be off and times when you will have family or personal prayer. Make realistic goals and stick to them.

Tuesday, March 17

Memorial of Saint Patrick

Today we remember the patron saint of Ireland, Saint Patrick. Decorate your dinner table with shamrocks today, and pray these lines from a beautiful prayer attributed to the saint: *Christ with me, Christ before me, / Christ behind me, Christ in me, / Christ beneath me, Christ above me, / Christ on my right, Christ on my left, / Christ where I lie down, Christ where I sit down, / Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me.*

Wednesday, March 18

Lenten Marathon

The spiritual exercises of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer are called *ascesis*, which means "training." The word comes from Greek and refers to the training of Olympic athletes. *Ascesis* trains the muscles of the soul just as exercises train the muscles of the body. Athletes excel at bodily activities. Spiritual athletes, the saints, excel at love, prayer, generosity, and virtue. If we give ourselves to the spiritual practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we will, at moments, become lax or frustrated. Just as if we were running a marathon, we must get the support we need at such moments, and we must be there for others when they need support.

Thursday, March 19

Solemnity of Saint Joseph

Saint Joseph, the patron saint of families, is often celebrated with an abundance of food shared with family, friends, and the poor. Small round breads, called *fritelli*, and blessed cakes called *sfinge di San Giuseppe* (cream puffs) are customary in Italy. Invite neighbors and friends for dinner today, and make a donation to your local food bank or to Catholic Charities at www.catholiccharitiesusa.org or 1-800-919-9338.



Friday, March 20

Praying the Rosary

There are many ways to pray during Lent. It is customary for individuals and families to pray the sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary on Fridays during Lent. If children don't already have rosaries, Lent is a good time to give them.

Saturday, March 21

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Today's Gospel (Luke 18:9-14) tells the parable of the Pharisee who took pride in his good works and the contrite tax collector who prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" How are we doing this Lent? Are we making progress? Sometimes the greatest progress involves coming face to face with our failures, weakness, and dependence on God. However, pride in our spiritual growth undermines that growth. Whether we think we are doing well or not so well, now is a good time to pray with sincere sorrow for our failures and with humility and gratitude for graces received.

