

Last Things

Virginia Priest Dies Thinking of Others

Father Michael C. Kelly did many good things at St. Francis Parish in Purcellville, Va., in the Arlington diocese, so parishioners shocked at his sudden accidental death in late December of 2008 remembered him with thanksgiving and sadness.

His outgoing personality and strong priestly spirit drew people to him. He liked to help people, parishioners said.

Driving in a windstorm to the funeral of a fellow priest, he saw a fallen tree limb lying across the road. He stopped to move the limb, and just then another limb broke from the tree, falling on him and killing him. Ordained in 1995, he was 53.

Reaching People: 'Wow'!

Father Robert Reed, of the Archdiocese of Boston, ordained in 1985, is the director of Catholic TV, the archdiocese's television ministry. The ministry presents "Wow," a televised game show that deals with religious questions and features third-grade students.

For each show, Father Reed writes as many as 70 questions, which the children try to answer, vying to show their knowledge of their Catholic faith. It has proven to be popular not only with youth but with adults. So far 50 installments have been produced.

The ministry produces other family-friendly and educational programming along with religious shows and news broadcasts.

The Laetare Rose

For centuries, Popes blessed bejeweled, golden roses on Laetare Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, and on occasion sent the rose to a female Catholic monarch as a sign of the monarch's fidelity to the Church. Grand Duchess Charlotte of Luxembourg, who died in 1985, the grandmother of the present Grand Duke Henri, was the last recipient, receiving the Golden Rose from Pope Pius XII in 1956.

Fifty Years Ago

In March 1959, *The Priest* published an article on the impact of parents upon vocations. Another article was about the congregation's participation in Mass. A report said that a Belgian bishop had proposed the very novel practice of ordaining married men as deacons to assist pastors. A Cincinnati publisher advertised a Missal, bound in genuine leather, for \$8.50.

By Father Patrick M. Carrion

Live and Breathe the Liturgical Calendar!

Favorite Days

I hate to admit it, but I often find that my two favorite days of the liturgical year are Easter Monday and the Feast of St. Stephen (December 26). It demands a lot of focus while in the midst of Advent and Lent to prepare for Christmas and Easter respectively. Time certainly does not stand still and, while we had a little more breather this year than last year in between these two seasons, the gerbil wheel of the liturgical year does not stop spinning.

There is barely a breather in between. From Jan. 12 -- Feb. 24, 2009, the Ordinary Time between the Christmas Season and Lent there are 44 days, however, since we typically do not count Sundays in Lent, we should only count 38 days!

'Ordinary' Down Time

The Church gives us 40 days of Lent to prepare for Easter -- she should always give us at least 40 days of just some ordinary down time. It is probably the singular most popular time for priests to take some time off. Those in the northern section of the country head south or take a Caribbean cruise for the warmth and longer days of light. We need more of these kinds of seasons!

I go back and forth on whether I like Lent or not. It is certainly a difficult time as we live out its disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. As it approaches, I cringe and begin to brace myself for what is coming. When on that parapet of Lent at Mardi Gras, looking at the whole six-plus weeks of fast and abstinence and the other disciplines that are ahead, I am ready to cave in, prostrate myself and worship Ordinary Time. I think this is way too long a journey before me. Why can't Lent be like Advent: Four weeks (sometimes even less) and it is over?

I know "40" is the biblical magic number but even Scripture scholars admit we should not take it literally; it just means a significant period of time -- 21 days is significant enough. When you count the 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday there are 46 calendar days.

Lent's Free Day

My family tradition always respected Sunday as a free day in Lent. It is like that middle square on the Bingo card or the "get out of jail free" card in Monopoly. I live for the Sundays of Lent. Since there are six Sundays, there are still 40 full days of Lent.

My parents also said Lent ended at 12 noon on Holy Saturday. My parents always gave up their glass of port wine before meals, (it was their couple time each day, catching up on their day. But at 12 noon on Holy Saturday they toasted that Lent was over with a glass of port wine. (They also had a glass on the six Sundays.)

I don't know where they got the idea that Jesus rose from the tomb on Saturday afternoon, but I never argued against it. I follow my parents' tradition (somewhat). I do not drink a glass wine with my meals unless I have company (I typically live alone). I invite a lot of people over during Lent!

I think the Church is wise having Lent start on a Wednesday; it helps us ease into it since Sundays are a free day. It is like going back to school at summer's end -- the week before Labor Day. That gives us a long weekend to ease into this new routine.

By the end of the first two weeks of Lent, I am beginning to ease into the season. By this point I have gotten the pattern of the disciplines down. I once read that it takes about 21 days to break a habit or start a new one.

Habit Breaking

Since Lent is 40+/- days, most of us probably need that extra time to solidify new ways of living our lives more simply through the Lenten discipline. Another way of looking at it is that we have two habits we need to break and we can focus on one habit during the first half of Lent and another habit during the second 21 days.

When I compare Lent to the seasons of Advent and Christmas, I must admit that I do like Lent more; maybe it is the hectic pace of Advent and Christmas, set by social expectations. These expectations can be tiring and anxiety driven.

Lent is Calmer

Even parish life is calmer during Lent. Lent has less negative emotion. The Advent and Christmas seasons seem to have more emotion connected with them. Parishioners seem more attached to the trappings of Christmas than those of Easter. There is more anxiety about the set up of the Nativity scene or number of trees than there is about Easter decorations.

I love the devotions in Lent. Maybe we need to cultivate more devotions for Advent to help people in the journey of waiting. The solemnity of the Lenten devotions seems to have a grace about them that encourages a more reflective time.

I enjoy the stations. There are so many versions of The Stations of the Cross. There are endless possibilities for creativity with this prayer, given that they are a non-sacramental devotion.

The plethora of versions says that we could never exhaust the story that the Stations portray. There are those from Mary's perspective, a social justice lens, those through the eyes of a child, etc. Each Lent I enjoy celebrating a different version each week. I hear the same story differently each week.

Devotions

These devotions and the countless other traditions place people on a quieter plane, (something that is sorely needed in a hectic world. In this age of e-mails, Ipods and instant messaging, it is good to take time to reflect on the information we already have: Jesus Christ died for our salvation.

As the Lenten season unfolds into those final days of Triduum, the faithful remnant come to church to celebrate the mysteries. I am, probably like you, disheartened to see so many empty pews on these days. We pour so much into these days obviously (since Christ poured himself out for the reality that these days reflect), but the days have become a lost art form.

The three celebrations of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil are packed full of meaning but the churches are not packed to reflect upon and celebrate them.

Since we celebrate these rituals only once a year I need to review the rubrics annually to make sure I have captured everything. It is probably a good thing we celebrate them once a year, so each year it is like doing them for the first time again.

As a priest who presides at the Triduum liturgies -- I find that the rituals have not become rote or routine. Each year I discover something deeper about these liturgies (deeper realities about myself and about God). These deeper realities unfold before me through the beauty and flow of these most sacred liturgies.

These new discoveries are only possible because of the 40 or 46 days that preceded it. If I had cut them short or if I had taken too many short cuts in Lent, I would enter the Triduum days unable to really discover anything "through, with or in" them.

So, here we are at the beginning of a new Lenten journey, walking the Way of the Cross again anew, hearing a redemptive word again for the first time and allowing our God, through, with and in Christ, to stretch out His arms to embrace us again.

Though I am relieved when Easter Monday arrives, I am glad it took 40 days to enter into the sacred mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. TP