



FATHER ANTON’S WORDS OF WISDOM: The reading for the first Tuesday of Lent is the spirit in which we are to usher in the season. I have placed it here because I feel it is essential in your understanding of what it means to be one of God’s children. The reading is from Paul’s letter to the Romans: *“Brothers and Sisters... All who are led by the Spirit of God are God’s children. You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which you can cry out “Abba – Father” The Spirit itself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God. But if we are children, we are heirs as well; heirs of God and heirs with Christ. We suffer with him so we can be glorified with him. I consider the sufferings of the present to be as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed in us. Indeed the whole created world eagerly awaits the revelation of the children of God. Creation was made subject to futility, no of its own accord but by him who once subjected it; not without hope, because the world itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.”* These are

powerful words and we need to breathe them in over and over again until they permeate our souls to the point they become one with us. There really is no greater gift. Here at St. John’s it has been a trying couple of weeks. We have said good-bye to the long time parish member and have been busy working to stock our store, and prepare to receive our beloved Patriarch Sviatoslav. and we also have many who are very seriously ill. While at times it can be a bit overwhelming, we need to remember that to be one of God’s children is to embrace not just the good times in our lives, but those times when illness and suffering comes uninvited and tasks become overwhelming. Human weakness isn’t new to the story of humanity, but through the course of our lives we can see when we let it get the best of us. In the Old Testament suffering was believed to be a punishment of God for the sins of humanity; if there was a catastrophe that couldn’t be explained it was God’s doing – he was showing the power of his vengeance. Jesus, in the New Testament gave us a much different image of God.

Jesus teaches us that God is a loving Father that cares for His children. God is full of mercy and compassion – quick to forgive and that His love is unconditional. Over the years and throughout the history of the Church this image of a loving God has become a bit tarnished. Prior to the middle-ages God was merciful and forgiving, and slowly the image changed through the “dark-ages” to an image of a vengeful and punishing deity who would go as far as He could to punish humanity and to inflict suffering and pain on a sinful world. Only since the Second Vatican Council has there been an effort to move hearts from fear to love, and to move to an understanding of God that was more in line with the teachings

of Jesus. +Pope John the 23rd and now Pope Francis “opened the windows to allow fresh air” to come in – in other words to call on the Holy Spirit to bring renewal into the hearts of the faithful and the Church. What is your image of God? Do you truly believe that He loves you just as you are? Do you accept His forgiveness by forgiving yourself? In other words can you accept and embrace your humanity? Paul encourages us to do just that “You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear – but a spirit of adoption through which you can cry out ‘Abba-Father.’” He gives us the image of a loving Father. Relationship is defined through love rather than through fear. Suffering is put into perspective – it isn’t a punishment from God, no human parent would inflict pain and suffering on their child no matter what the circumstance, so how can we possibly reconcile the idea of a vengeful God with a loving Father? Lent is the perfect time to reflect on our relationship with God through his Son Jesus. In the person of Jesus, God has chosen to walk with us through life, not to stand in front, nor to lag behind, but to stand beside us! Yes He is indeed God, but HE IS LOVING PARENT; not interfering in human affairs but being with us through those times our decisions have brought confusion, and at times, pain into our lives. He is there not to say “I told you so,” but rather “I am with you.” This is my God. This is the loving Father that I serve, and this is the image of God that have tried to share with those entrusted to throughout my years of my priesthood. I have gone through the desert; I certainly know what is to be tempted and believe it or not, we priests understand the concept of sin just as good as you do. Through good times and bad I have witnessed and felt the God’s presence, and through all the turmoil still experienced peace.

I try to model my life after Christ – I try to be a servant rather than to be served, and all I do is out of love for those I care for. If I didn’t love what I do, and if didn’t believe in nor experience God’s unconditional love I would have left my ministry a good number of years ago. My life just as yours is a Lenten journey, it is a constant opportunity of self-discovery and renewal – it is a journey that calms my fears and assures me of a Father’s love for his children. I encourage you to come make an extra effort to attend the Lenten services offered r to you; in these prayers you will be reassured of God’s love, come to understand the true meaning of sacrifice and suffering, and hopefully rediscover again the true meaning of faithfulness.

Let us pray: Loving God, often life seems overwhelming and situations arise that come uninvited and for which I am unprepared. Help me during this Lenten season to rediscover my relationship with you as a loving Father. May all my fears give way to love and trust, and may I have the courage to always journey with you through Jesus to the meaning of life – to live, to love, to laugh, to pray, to share, to forgive and be forgiven and finally at the end of my days to rest in your arms.