

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father/ *(Dear Loving Father, I am Your Child)* **Who art in heaven/** *(although You cannot be contained, I feel Your presence in my heart)/* **Hallowed by Thy name/** *(Your name is Holy because it gives life, it gives me life)* **Thy Kingdom come/** *(I recognize and celebrate Your kingdom in which I already live, and I long for the time when we can be together in its fullness)* **Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven/** *(Help me to recognize Your will in every situation, and when my life seems overwhelming may I know that You are with me/* **Give us this day our daily bread/***Help me to understand the difference between my needs and my wants – and grant to me only that which would help me to be generous with others as you are with your gifts to me/* **And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us/***Give me the courage to forgive others always, even in those situations where it may seem impossible, since your love for me is unconditional and your forgiveness is ever present/* **But deliver us from evil./***Help me to recognize all that would prevent me from feeling your presence and your love, for evil is the absence of love./* **Amen./** *I know my prayer is heard.*

FATHER ANTON'S WORDS OF WISDOM: The Christmas season is slowly coming to an end. The feast of the Presentation of Jesus into the temple is when it ends officially, and in two weeks it is already the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. It would seem that this year we will go from Christmas to Lent without much in between. I think if we properly look at Lent we would soon realize that, for you and me, it is simply a part of our everyday



living. True it is the season that immediately comes before Holy Week and Easter, but properly understood it is about life's journey. Too many of us we look at the time before Easter as a time to look at our lives in order to see where we have failed, and if that is all you get from it, I truly feel sorry for you. For me Lent

reminds me that to be able to experience the Divine; that great Love that we proclaim Sunday after Sunday... I must learn first to accept my humanity and to embrace it as a gift from God.

We tend think a life without challenges, or without pain and suffering would be our “utopia”, but we would be fooling ourselves. When we invited Jesus into our lives he came not to diminish our humanity, but rather to embrace it. Life is to be lived and embraced. No matter how hard you and I try to run away from situations that seem too much for us, we know that eventually they find us, and usually these times can be even more confusing and unbearable. So, what's the good news? It's quite simple – Jesus came so that we may have the fullness of life – and this doesn't mean a life that is free from human suffering or pain, but rather a life that is shared by Him.

Until we are able to look at life as a gift, and at every situation that confronts us as opportunities, we will never know happiness. I learned many, many years ago that you cannot make yourself happy, nor can anyone else – happiness is a choice, and it's as simple as that. Have you ever wondered how people who live in poverty, or those who are seriously ill or dying can still laugh and go about their daily lives as if nothing is wrong? It's because they choose not to give anything, or

any one, or any situation power over their lives. They choose to be happy.

We've just celebrated "God with Us", Who chose to come down to share our lives and to live our human experience. If this isn't a God who is bursting with love and compassion for humanity, why would He bother? This Season of Christmas leads us into Lent – it reminds us that through life's journey we are not alone, and regardless of what befalls us we will be okay. This is a time after the hype of the season to enter now into the quiet and contemplate the love of God. It is an opportunity to celebrate our humanity, for only when we can do this will we realize that we are all God's children. We are born out of love, we are initiated into that love through our Baptism, and we come into its fullness when our earthly journey comes to an end.

As I look at my own life, I know this to be true. Without God's love and His grace where would I be? I was fortunate to recognize even as a child how people came into my life not by accident but for a reason: A grandmother who loved me more than my own parents, and yet I realized after many long years they did the best they could in accord with their ability. I had wonderful teachers who helped to nurture me while I was at school, and who expressed their genuine concern for my welfare. There was Fr. Downey and Fr. Lowney who were a big influence in my life. Fr. Downey was a heavy set man with a wonderful sense of humor and always made me feel safe. Fr. Lowney was a new priest that came to the parish when I was about 8 years old, and at first I really didn't care for him. He was young, and seemed a bit too serious to me. One day I came from school for the 12 noon Mass and there was no altar server, so he came down and asked me if I would serve – all by myself – after that I thought: "He's just as nice as Fr. Downey, but in a different way." I served for Fr. Lowney for many years after that. I had an Aunt and Uncle who were willing to take me in so I could get my life on track, and expected nothing in return. Bishop Fulton supported my decision to study for priesthood, and after meeting Fr. Walter and attending St. John's, when I approached him about returning to my Ukrainian Catholic roots, he was fully supportive.

I have been blessed with wonderful parishes, and parishioners As often as I can, I try to take time to reflect on my life – and to recognize how God has worked through others, and through me to make a difference. This is a challenge that I give to all who are reading my column this week. Ideally you should make time daily, not just for prayer, but for preparation. For what are you grateful? Where do you need forgiveness? What opportunity was there for you to be Christ to another? Don't just think about the things that

you did that you seek forgiveness for, but how about for the things that you didn't do that you know you should have or had the opportunity to do. Where in your life are you confused and need guidance? Where have you forgotten that you are a child of God, and that that dignity calls for a certain way of interacting with others? How often have you felt sorry for yourself even though you know that compared to others your situation doesn't even come close? What effort do you put into prayer other than just opening a book... in other words do you "say" your prayers or do you "pray" your prayers? Do you still live in the past? Do you still allow others to hold you hostage by not forgiving them? One thing my life's journey has taught me is that holding grudges and not being able to let go of the past is a sure way to poison your life and your relationships. We cannot change what was... we just can't, so there is no point in dwelling on it. We can take charge of now, and make choices that will move our lives forward in joy and not in bitterness or fear. We cannot see the future, but we can chart a course toward the still waters and live peacefully even in times for turmoil. Let's then begin our countdown to Lent with joy and anticipation, as an opportunity to face new challenges and to adventure into areas of our lives we may not have had the courage to before, and let the simplest of all prayers be our guide. We pray the Lord's prayer so often I think we forget it contains all the elements we need to recognize our humanity, to embrace our identity as children of God, and to live life rather than to merely exist. Let's pray it this way:

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