

Lent 2018

Dear Friend of the Missions,

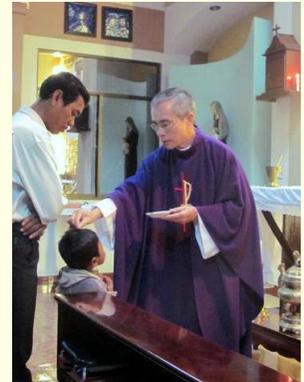
Are you ready for it? **Ash Wednesday 2018 arrives on February 14th** . It seems like each year it arrives earlier. I guess that I have to admit to “*old age*” and a fast moving pace as well as a bit of forgetfulness. And, of course, the advertising media doesn't help much either. They are already bombarding us with Valentine's ads and even some Easter sales as well. *I suppose that living in the present is but a pipedream?*

Fortunately for us, the Church has a *spiritual antidote* for all of the commercial advertising. We call it **Lent** and it begins on **Ash Wednesday**, which is on **February 14th** this year. This day is a public recognition of our human weakness and frailty as we go to the church to have ashes placed on our foreheads.



Ashes have been used even before Christian times as a symbol of our *mortality*, of *mourning*, and of *penance*. The word “*ashes*” is found in the Old Testament a total of 48 times and in the New Testament it is found four times. Using ashes as a symbol of penance is very much a part of our Catholic Christian tradition. It is an **outward reminder** that we need to spend some quality time on a daily basis to do some **inner soul searching about our past, our present, and our future**. *Do I think that I am where I am today without the graces and blessings of God?* Ashes can be a reminder that the only certainty in life is death. Everything else is given to us by our loving God.

Lent is more than a time for us to do penance. It's also a *time to look at our Catholic Christian lives to see if anything needs to be "fine tuned"*. It is a time perhaps for us to **show appreciation** and to **give thanks** for all the **graces and blessings we have received** throughout the past year. *Do I really believe that God loves me and that He loves everyone the same way? Even if they are another color, or religion, or economic status, or political party?* If there are areas that need a little bit of “*tweaking*” then Lent is the perfect time to do so. **What are your plans for Lent?** Instead of focusing on the “*nots*” I would suggest doing *more* of something such as reading more Scripture, spending more time in quiet meditation, visiting ailing parents or friends more often, etc.



I am once again blessed with the opportunity of spending another Lenten season in Vietnam. Both my personal and spiritual life are being challenged daily. Rising at 4:30 AM is no easy feat for me and spending upwards of four hours per day in chapel is another challenge. As difficult as it is, I find myself doing so joyfully because I am blessed to be in a community of dedicated Franciscan students who truly love the Church and their Franciscan vocation. There are twenty-two novices this year.



Participating in public and private acts of sacrifice with the Catholic Christian community during this holy time strengthens everyone. *Our communal actions unify us. I encourage you to share your Lenten sacrificial practices with your children and grandchildren. They won't learn about our Catholic Faith Traditions unless you share it with them.*

Your prayer support is of great comfort to me as I live out my Franciscan life in Southeast Asia for the next few months. Take some time each day to get away from the distractions and temptations of this world and give some extra time to the Lord. ***During this holy season of Lent, consider doing something special for someone as an act of unsolicited love. The beneficiary will be surprised and so will you as you experience the joy of helping someone in their time of need.***



If during the course of your Lenten journey you discover that your simplified schedule leaves you with some extra funds (*one less beverage each day, fewer movies, 9 holes of golf instead of 18, or . . . 25 cents each time you have a negative thought about someone?*) you can be sure that our Southwest Franciscan Missions would be most accepting and appreciative of them. May God be with you and your loved ones in All Ways. Let us continue to pray for each other. I wish you,

Peace and All Good!

Br Bruce, ofm

P.S. If you are comfortable with the Internet and would like to follow my Asian missionary adventures, you can read my weekly letter which describes my activities. I post them on our Development Office Web Page: <http://www.olgofm.com/>

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Please accept my secure **electronic donation** as a Lenten Sacrificial Offering. Use it for the good works of the Franciscans of the Southwest USA Missions.