

# SERF



# VICARIATE NEWS FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021

*SERF — Serving, Evangelizing / Educating, Reaching Out / Witnessing our Faith*

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## COMMYN'S SENSE

Although perhaps experienced differently than in other years, at the beginning of Lent, we received ashes, the ancient sign of sorrow, and heard one of two calls to repentance: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return," or "Repent and believe in the Gospel." This call to self-knowledge, repentance, and belief is the axis around which Lent revolves. We prepare to celebrate the Lord's Paschal Mystery by preparing to receive it as the entirely unearned gift that it is. Our preparations will not change the fact that we will "return to dust." Nor will they let us earn a place in God's Kingdom as something we deserve. The Christian life is a life of repentance: metanoia in Greek. It's not simply a call to be sorry for sin. It's been described by some as "let your mind be blown away by unimagined possibilities!" Jesus preached this metanoia as an invitation to believe that God was about something entirely new and wonderful -- and everyone who so desired could participate in this good news.

This sort of repentance may actually be more difficult than sorrow for sin. Sorrow looks at the past and can easily get caught up in ideas of guilt and punishment. Metanoia is about hope and a vision of new life. It's the stuff of dreams that only God's spirit can inspire -- and it is ongoing. Jesus embodies that newness, hope and promise and you and I are called to be his disciples.

Precisely because of this, Lent is a season of joy. We are freed from the impossible task of saving ourselves. Most folks will describe Lent as "a time of fasting" or simply "the

forty days." Yet Lent relates to the word "lengthen." It is the season in which the days are lengthening, and light is returning. In a word, spring. But it is so much more. When you and I come to new honesty about ourselves and repent, we are freed to trust in God's mercy. No longer having to justify ourselves, we are freed for the task of learning to live what God desires for us. In this

sense, Lent is the time for stretching out, pushing forward, striving to follow Christ.

Lent is also a time to deepen our understanding of what it means to be a disciple. This Lent, the Archdiocese is encouraging three ways that everyone in the Archdiocese might be united in the common work of discipleship formation.

The first is **Confession**. Opportunities to celebrate the sacrament were cut short in Lent 2020, and there was a greater demand during Advent.

As things open up further, and more people are comfortable returning to church, particularly as the general dispensation regarding Mass attendance draws to a close, parishes are expecting to provide more times for confessions. While our usual Vicariate Penance Services will not be possible again this Lent because of restrictions still in place regarding larger gatherings, our SERF parishes are again blocking two specific times when most of the parishes will open to celebrate the sacrament. Parishes are also adding additional times in

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an effort to provide different days and times that are convenient for everyone. Some of those times can be found elsewhere in this newsletter, and our individual SERF parishes will be updating their schedules on their parish websites and in their weekly bulletins. The Archdiocesan Department of Communications is incorporating Lenten Confession times into [www.massfinder.org](http://www.massfinder.org) to help everyone find times and places for this sacrament easily.

The second focus is **Scripture**. Scripture has a unique power to transform the human heart. Archbishop Vigneron released a Pastoral Note on Scripture in the life of a disciple just prior to Lent, coinciding with the "Sunday of the Word of God" in late January. In addition, the Archdiocese has invited everyone to sign up for one of six possible Scripture Challenges as part of "Run so as to Win the Race." Over 500 people signed up to begin in January, and others have joined them beginning on Ash Wednesday. Parishes are encouraging small groups, and a variety of bible studies. Others are offering daily / weekly reflections on the readings by way of social media or email. The 2021 edition of **52 Sundays** offers not only the Sunday gospel, but also a family challenge, some family fun, and a recipe to assist families in reclaiming the Lord's Day for faith and family.

In his Pastoral Note, *The Power of the Word of God*, the Archbishop underscores the necessity of turning to the Word. "As the Archdiocese of Detroit continues to undergo its 'missionary conversion', so that every Catholic may be formed and sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple, I would like to highlight the necessity of turning to the Word of God to equip and inspire us for this task." He continued, "In order to meet with confidence and wisdom the many challenges of our time, Catholics need to be renewed in their zeal to study the Bible and to teach it, even to the very young."

The Archbishop reviews Catholic doctrine concerning the Bible, reflects on how we read the Bible in prayerful dialogue with the Lord, and explains the importance of the Bible in our life as a local Church and our call to respond to the world. He also offers some recommendations on biblical renewal that might be used in parishes. The complete text of the Pastoral Note can be found at [www.unleashthegospel.org/pastoral-notes](http://www.unleashthegospel.org/pastoral-notes).

Reading Scripture prayerfully becomes a dialogue of love. We listen to God's heart through his Word and we respond from our heart in prayer. Christian tradition developed the practice of *lectio divina* as a way to exercise this kind of prayerful reading.

*Lectio divina* traditionally consists of four simple steps:

**Reading** (*lectio*): Read a passage of Scripture slowly and attentively.

**Meditation** (*meditatio*): Meditate on the passage, turning it over in your mind and connecting it with other passages in the Bible.

**Prayer** (*oratio*): Respond to God in prayer, telling him your thoughts, questions, hopes, fears, and desires as they relate to the passage.

**Contemplation** (*contemplatio*): Rest in God, enjoying his presence and receiving his love.

Christian tradition has developed other helpful ways for us to listen attentively to God speaking to us through his Word. The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius, in which we use our imagination to place ourselves within the scene of a biblical story, is a particularly effective way to incorporate Scripture into our prayer.

Scripture is a gift not only for individuals but for the body of Christ as a whole. The primary home for Scripture is the liturgy. In announcing the "Sunday of the Word of God" in his 2019 Apostolic Letter, *Aperuit illis*, Pope Francis noted that "Sacred Scripture and the sacraments are inseparable." The Catechism of the Catholic Church echoes that understanding. "The Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body." [#103] The entire liturgy is steeped in Scripture. The more the faithful know the Scriptures, the more fully will they be able to participate in the liturgy and the more fruitfully will they receive Christ, the

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living Word, in Holy Communion.

Pope Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Exhortation emphasized the need for all the Church's activities to become more grounded in the Bible. In a particular way, the Church's mission of evangelization relies on Scripture because the Word of God has a mysterious attractive power, even for unbelievers who do not know that the Bible is God's Word. Its truth resonates with a human heart that is open. Seeking to unleash the Gospel without making use of Scripture is like trying to drive a car without wheels. As Pope Francis noted, "All evangelization is based on [the word of God], listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the Word. The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized" [*The Joy of the Gospel #174*].

God's Word calls for a response from the human heart. Jesus is the divine Sower who sows the seed of his Word generously, but the fruitfulness of the seed depends on the quality of the soil that receives it. Take the time to read the parable again in Luke's Gospel (Luke 8:5-15).

Our efforts to unleash the Gospel must include bringing people into deep and life-giving contact with God's Word. While Catholics have heard the readings at Mass for years, many are unfamiliar with the context of those readings or the overall storyline of the Bible. Having heard excerpts of Scripture, some may not have read a whole book of the Bible or discovered the interconnections among the different parts of Scripture. Many are hungry to study the Bible so that they can learn more about Jesus.

As our local Church and its activities become more saturated with the Word of God, that Word becomes the seed of a way of life in which Christ is known and loved, believed and adored, and in which our relationships with one another and with the outside world more fully reflect his love. The Archbishop's hope is that "By the grace of the Holy Spirit, may it be said of the Church in Detroit as of the early Church in Jerusalem, "The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples increased greatly" (Acts 6:7).

The third focus is **St. Joseph**. Pope Francis has stated that 2021 is the Year of St. Joseph. More about that next month as we celebrate the Solemnity of St. Joseph on March 19.

Together with our fasting and almsgiving, let's continue to hold one another in prayer throughout Lent.

Reverend James E. Commyn  
SERFVicar@stlucychurch.com

**RECONCILIATION TIMES DURING LENT**

At press time, the following additional opportunities to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance within the vicariate have been publicized. These are in addition to the regular times offered throughout the year. Continue to check with the each parish as additional times may have been added.

March 24: 6-7:30 p.m. St. Clare  
 March 26: 1-2:30 p.m. St. Basil  
 March 30 1-2:30 p.m. St. Basil  
 March 30 6:30-7 p.m. St. Paul  
 March 31 6-7:30 p.m. St. Clare

Most of the SERF Parishes:

**March 25**  
 1-2:30 p.m.  
 7-8:30 p.m.  
**March 29**  
 1-2:30 p.m.  
 7-8:30 p.m.

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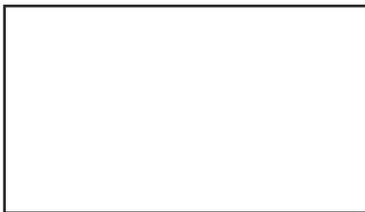
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