

## **Introducing Our Lenten Theme**

Since my first Lent here with you in 2011, we've selected a theme to help us focus our journey through the season. Although there's no formal requirement to do so, we continue to embrace what has become a tradition. Many have commented that a theme allows us to engage on a variety of levels and in a meaningful way, both individually and as a parish community. I'm certain that this Lent will be no exception, as we highlight the remaining traditional pillar of Lenten practices, namely, Almsgiving. As you would recall, the other two – Prayer and Fasting – were the themes in 2013 and 2014, respectively. And, as with those practices, we'll likely discover that Almsgiving is multifaceted and can deepen our relationship with Jesus the Christ on the road to Easter.

Here's how our patron, St. Thomas of Villanova, sets the stage in one of his Ash Wednesday Sermons. "If you saw Christ begging, would you not give him your heart for alms? Oh it is he who begs in the poor man: do not close your heart of compassion...He comes to you, then, in the poor man, so that you might not be ashamed to give him a coin or piece of bread. You will receive it back, a hundred times more than you offered." (*Ash Wednesday, Sermon 2*, 28-29) As Thomas notes, Almsgiving, at its core, means donating money or goods to assist those in need – and, in doing so, we encounter Christ. "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Mt 25:40b) There will be various opportunities to participate in this form of Almsgiving, a few of which I'd like to bring to your attention here:

- a real concerted effort to support Catholic Relief Services' Operation Rice Bowl throughout Lent
- a change/coin drive – "It All Adds Up: Your Change Makes a Difference" – the weekend of March 11-12; bring in all that change you've been saving up or have laying around the house
- an Electronics Recycling Drive on Saturday, April 1<sup>st</sup> in the lower Rosemont Chapel parking lot from 10am-2pm, sponsored by our parish's Stewardship Council; start gathering up all those old electronics to drop off.

Keep your eye out in the bulletin and on the website for more information on these and other activities, in which all ages can get involved in giving. Remember even pennies add up!

In terms of giving from our treasure, from our resources, there also will be a weekend (March 18-19) devoted to reflecting on our rich Augustinian heritage and support to our Province of St. Thomas of Villanova. We'll warmly welcome the Prior Provincial, Fr. Michael DiGregorio, O.S.A., who will speak at all the Masses.

As the quote from St. Thomas' Sermon indicates, we'll be challenged to consider Almsgiving even more broadly – to the giving of our very selves – "would you not give him your heart for alms?" During the Fifth Week of Lent, we'll focus on giving of our time and talent. Then, as we move into Holy Week, we'll draw on a concept of Almsgiving that St. Augustine so often mentions – forgiving. In preparation for this and to learn more, plan on attending the talk – "St. Augustine and Almsgiving: Insights for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" – offered by Fr. Allan on Monday, March 13<sup>th</sup> in the Rosemont Chapel at 7pm. We hope to live stream this, as well, particularly for the benefit of our homebound parishioners.

Finally, the boards that we've used the past couple years will be back in the Villanova Church and the Rosemont Chapel. This time we'll be able to add leaves to barren trees, representing our acts of Almsgiving. By Easter, they should be in full bloom! Again, let's draw on our patron, St. Thomas, for the last word – “If you are good stewards, more will be given you. Consult experience: who has ever become poor through almsgiving?” (*Sermon – Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, 6*)

God Bless! Fr. Joe