

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Brothers and Sisters,

We began our Lenten Journey with a cross traced in ashes on the foreheads of all who came to Church on Ash Wednesday. Ashes direct our attention to the transitory character of created realities - that nothing in this world is permanent and nothing in the world of matter is forever.

The season of Lent calls us to be more attentive and reflective and prayerful. Pay attention to your desires. We have all kinds of desires some good and some not so good. During this first week of Lent, reflect on those wonderful desires that are there but have not been acted upon and see what you would like to do to respond to those desires. Nurture desires that are positive and optimistic and strive to fulfill those desires. Reflect also on the desires that are not healthy or noble or virtuous. Prayerfully choose to purify or abandon these unholy desires.

We are a people who have been gifted and sensitized by the Holy Spirit. We should be aware of what's going on within us and around us. St. Paul advises us, "...set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God... not on earthly things." (Colossians 3:1-2). To "set heart or mind" means pay attention...be attentive, be vigilant! Pay attention to the concerns and needs of those entrusted to your care. Being attentive enables us to discover and correct our mistakes and to help others watch their lives and their conduct. Our families, communities and churches are healthy when we are vigilant, when we are attentive to one another's concerns and needs.

Be attentive to what is important and what is trivial, what needs action now and what is not really all that important or urgent. Be attentive to whatever is going on beneath the surface. There is always something beyond what seems important or urgent in the moment.

The season of Lent calls us to be attentive to the moments of grace that God puts in front of us. Notice the "moments of grace" in your life. These moments are not just something that happens to you...they are what you can offer someone else - the times that you can be there for someone, listen to someone, compliment someone, help someone - serve someone. Those are the moments in life worth paying attention to - they are moments of Grace and now is the moment of grace.

May this season of Lent enable you to become more attentive, sensitive, and vigilant.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

First Week of Lent

February 23 - 28, 2026

**Be a sign of the living Christ, do not be afraid of what the Lord asks of you.
Open yourselves to Christ, listen to Him in the silence of prayer.
Accompany those who are most fragile, take charge of those who are alone.
Be the seed of a more fraternal world! Be families with big hearts!
Be the welcoming face of the Church! And please pray, always pray!
(Pope Francis)**

February 23 – Monday, First Week of Lent

**Radiate an energy of serenity and peace
so that you have an uplifting effect on those you come into contact with.
(Wayne Dyer)**

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

Moses calls the people to be holy because the Lord is holy. Such holiness requires not only reverence for God but also deep respect for self and others, even other's property. Moses spells out the details of the Covenant with God. Deep reverence for God must reflect: Deep reverence for people; Deep reverence for self; Deep reverence for creation.

Reflect on your sense of reverence for God and for all that is God's!

Psalm 19

**May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart,
Find favor before you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.**

Mathew 25:31-46

The final judgment is not about how you kept the rules and how many prayers you said. It is about how you treated those in need and why you treated them the way you did. The good that is done for others is not because others needed your "good" or because there was a reward for doing good but because you couldn't help but do the good. Being good and doing good, being generous and doing the generous thing, being compassionate and doing the compassionate thing...etc. is your nature, your character, your quality. **It just reflects who you are!**

There can be no holiness without concern for others, especially the needy, the poor, and the marginalized. We cannot love God without loving others in truth. Loving in truth is to love as God loves, to reflect God's love. This means that **we must love those who cannot love in return and those who cannot love the way we have learned to love. To be holy is to love** - this love is unconditional, non-judgmental and accepting. Jesus says love is beyond piety and good deeds. Our love must cross the boundaries and break barriers.

We minister to the Lord when we minister to each other and to all in need, without even realizing that we are ministering to the Lord.

Saint of the Day, February 23 - St. Polycarp and 89 other saints are remembered this day.

St. Polycarp was born around 69 C.E. but we know little else of his childhood and youth. He was a member of that small band of "Apostolic Fathers", the immediate followers of the Apostles. He was a disciple of St. John, the "Beloved Disciple" of Jesus. A letter from Saint John to Polycarp has survived. Soon after the death of St. John, Polycarp was named the Bishop of Smyrna (now Turkey).

Tradition tells us that Polycarp actually kissed the chains of the great St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch as the latter passed by Smyrna en route to martyrdom. St. Ignatius also wrote a letter to Polycarp which is still extant. Polycarp instructed St. Irenaeus (famous for his work Against Heresies) and Papias of Hierapolis, the important early Scripture scholar. He traveled all the way to Rome to meet with Pope Saint Anicetus to work out when, exactly, Easter should be observed each year.

Polycarp was an unrelenting defender of the orthodox faith especially against the heresies known as Valentinianism and Marcionism, both of which were types of Gnosticism. He was an "Apostolic Father," a disciple of St. John, a defender of orthodoxy, the bishop of Smyrna, the friend of Ignatius of Antioch and Pope Anicetus, teacher and letter-writer and a sort of bridge between the Eastern and Western Churches.

In the sixth year of Marcus Aurelius, a violent persecution broke out in Asia in which the faithful gave heroic proof of their courage. When the chief of police, Herod, sent horsemen by night to surround his lodging, Polycarp was upstairs in bed, but refused to make his escape saying, 'God's Will be done.' He went down, met them at the door, ordered them supper, and desired only some time in prayer before he went with them.

At 86, Polycarp was led into the crowded Smyrna stadium to be burned alive. The flames did not harm him and he was finally killed by a dagger. The centurion ordered the saint's body burned. He died in 155.

February 24 – Tuesday, First Week of Lent

Serenity is a state of being stable with an enduring sense of inner peace, a peace that lasts through good times and not so good times, even through trials and tribulations.

Isaiah 55:10-11

Chapter 55 of Isaiah invites us to come to God, to listen to God's wisdom, to be fed and nourished on God's word of wisdom, to renounce the way of foolishness and wickedness and to turn to God and God's ways. The prophet says God's ways are not our ways. So, seek the Lord and his ways!

God's word is alive, active and dynamic. God's word is faithful word and the word will become fruitful and life-giving.

Nourish and strengthen yourselves with God's word.

Psalm 34

**Glorify the Lord with me,
Let us together extol his name.
I sought the Lord and he answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears.**

Mathew 6:7-15

This is how Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Begin prayer by addressing God "Father". Come into the presence of someone who need not be forced to give, but to a Father who simply gives. Reverence to God must be first, before all else.

The first "three" petitions are about reverence for God - holy be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done. God first. All other things will then fall in their proper places.

Prayer should not be our attempt to bend God's will to our desires - but must be a surrender of our will to God's will - bringing our will into harmony with God's will.

The second "three" petitions are about our needs, and they cover all life: praying for the

essential needs (daily bread) for the day; forgiveness for sin of the past; help for meeting the testing times in the future.

Bring the whole of life – your present, past and future - before God.

Saint of the Day, February 24 - Blessed Luke Belludi and 8 other saints are remembered this day.

In 1220, Saint Anthony was preaching conversion to the inhabitants of Padua when a young nobleman, Luke Belludi, came up to him and humbly asked to receive the habit of the followers of Saint Francis. At the age of twenty, he was received into the Order of Friars Minor, the Franciscans, by Saint Francis himself. A few years later, Friar Luke met for the first time Saint Anthony of Padua. Thereafter Luke served as an assistant to the great Franciscan preacher on his missions across northern Italy. In 1231, he had the privilege of assisting Anthony at his death.

Friar Luke was appointed guardian of the Friars Minor in the city of Padua. In 1239, the city fell into the hands of its enemies. Nobles were put to death, the mayor and council were banished, the great university of Padua gradually closed, and the church dedicated to Saint Anthony was left unfinished. Luke himself was expelled from the city but secretly returned.

As the crisis in Padua continued, Luke would go to pray at the tomb of Saint Anthony following the recitation of the night office. While doing this one night, Luke and another Franciscan with him heard a voice from the tomb assuring them that their prayers for Padua were soon to be answered. The city was liberated not long afterward. It was Friar Luke who supervised the construction of the Padua basilica that now enshrines Saint Anthony's body. He died on February 17, 1286

February 25 – Wednesday, First Week of Lent

**Our trust in God's presence with us brings us serenity
even in the midst of storm.**

Jonah 3:1-10

The people of Nineveh, king and common folks, repented, changed their ways and turned to God at the preaching of Jonah. God had compassion on the Ninevites.

The season of Lent calls us to conversion, to a change of heart. Reflect on the need for your own personal conversion!

Psalm 51

**Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness;
In your abundant compassion, blot out my offense.
Wash away all my guilt; from my sin, cleanse me.**

Luke 11:29-32

They (Scribes and Pharisees) looked for God in the abnormal - in the extraordinary. Jesus constantly called people to recognize God and God's presence in the ordinary everyday experiences...in little children, in the widow's mite, in the lilies of the field, in the birds of the air.....

Jesus refused to give extraordinary signs and called the scribes and Pharisees and all his followers to find God in the ordinary things of everyday life. Jesus presented himself, not what he did, as the sign, God's sign. Jesus is God's sign for us just as Jonah was God's sign for the Nineties and Solomon God's sign for the Queen of Sheba.

The disciple must now become a sign of the Master.....perhaps imperfect, but still a sign that carries the message of the master..... The world must meet the Master in the disciple.

Saint of the Day, February 25 - Blessed Sebastian of Aparicio and 15 other saints are remembered this day.

Sebastian de Aparicio y del Prado was born on January 20, 1502 in the Galician region of Spain. He was the third child and only son of Juan de Aparicio and Teresa del Prado, who were poor, but pious peasants, and spent his childhood tending sheep and cattle. He learned his prayers from his parents, but had no schooling, and was not able to read or write. When Aparicio was older, he sought work outside his region in order to help support his family and to provide dowries for his sisters. He finally decided to improve his fortune by traveling to the newly conquered Americas. He sailed from Spain, landing in Veracruz later that year and settled in Puebla. Aparicio began to cultivate indigenous maize but also European wheat. He was one of the first Spaniards who raised and trained cattle to use in plow farming and transportation.

Realizing the difficulty of transporting supplies in Mexico, and between growing Spanish settlements, he promoted building roads and a highway to connect the silver mining city of Zacatecas with Mexico

City. . He established the transport system which sent agricultural products to Spain and brought necessary items to the residents of New Spain.

Aparicio prospered, becoming a wealthy man. He, however, had never lost his commitment to a life of faith. He followed a very ascetic way of life, sleeping on the ground and eating the poorest foods. His charity extended to all, giving much of his wealth to those in need, and lending money without asking anything in return. Eventually feeling pressured to marry, at the age of 60 he became engaged to a young woman who had no hopes of finding a husband, due to her lack of a dowry. They agreed to practice a white marriage, not consummating the union. Though she was much younger, his wife died a year later. He married again two years after that, with the same arrangement, only to lose his second wife by the time he was 70.

Shortly after being widowed for the second time, Aparicio grew seriously ill and began to re-assess his life. Feeling a call to enter the consecrated life, he frequently visited the Franciscan friars and finally decided to apply to the friars to be admitted as a lay brother. He received the religious habit of a friar on June 9, 1574, at the age of 72 and made his profession of religious vows on June 13, 1575. As he was still illiterate, his document of commitment had to be signed by a fellow friar, Alfonso Peinado. At the friary, over the course of the following year, he held the offices of cook, sacristan, gardener and porter. He also was assigned to be the quaestor of the community, the one assigned to travel throughout the local community, seeking food and alms for the upkeep of the friars and those who came to them for help. The builder of Mexico's highway system had become a beggar on it.

Aparicio was given an oxcart with two oxen to travel through the city and the surrounding villages. He lived on the road for days, sleeping on the ground under the cart in bad weather. He would spend his time meditating on the Passion and on the teachings and example of St. Francis of Assisi. He spent the last 26 years of his life in this way. On the evening of February 25, 1600, Aparicio asked to be laid on the ground to meet his death, in imitation of St. Francis. He soon died in the arms of a fellow Galician, Friar Juan de San Buenaventura, with his last word being "Jesus". Sebastian was beatified in 1787 and is known as a patron of travelers.

February 26 – Thursday, First Week of Lent

**Trust in God's abiding presence with us helps us to be calm and serene
wherever we may be and whatever we may be doing,
even in troublesome times.**

Esther 12:14-16, 23-25

Esther, a Jewess, became queen of Persia. King Ahasuerus had fixed the date for the execution of the Jews in the kingdom in a single day. Esther, feeling intensely the pain of her people,

pours out the anguish of her soul and that of her people to God in prayer: Be mindful of us O Lord.....she prayed. Esther won favor with God and with God's favor the king and the Jews were saved.

Reflect on the providential care of God for God's people. Reflect on your own urgent need to pour out your heart and the heart of your people to God!

Psalm 138

**The Lord will complete what he has done for me;
Your kindness O Lord, endures forever;
Forsake not the work of your hands.**

Mathew 7:7-12

"The heavenly father will give good things to those who ask him...." and will not give anything dangerous or injurious to you.....Asking God is an act of trust that God has power over our lives - that God loves us so much that we can trust him with our lives, our lives' concerns, needs, problems, etc.

We place ourselves in the hands of Our Father who knows our needs more than we do ourselves. We stand before him with open arms to receive or to let go. We surrender ourselves to him and remain open to receive His Gifts.

Shortly before bed time, a little boy lost one of his favorite marbles, a large, colorful one. After searching for it unsuccessfully, the boy approached his father in tears, saying "Can I pray and ask God to help me find my marble?" The father agreed and they both closed their eyes and prayed. The boy prayed with great faith and the father joined him in his prayer: "Dear God, help me find my favorite marble". The next day, the father was afraid to ask his son if he had found the marble. He was concerned that the boy's sincere faith would be hurt if he had not found the marble. The father gently asked: "did you find the marble, son?" "No", the boy replied, "but God made me not to want to care about it anymore."

God has more ways to answer our prayers than simply saying "Yes" and granting our wish. There may be times when we pray about an issue or a concern and simply come to a place of peace about it.

Saint of the Day, February 26 - St. Isabel of France and 7 other saints are remembered this day.

Saint Isabel was born in 1271 to the King of Aragon, Spain. Baptized Elizabeth, after her great-aunt, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, she was known in her own country by the Spanish form of that name, Isabella. At 12 years of age, she was married to Denis, King of Portugal.

She divided her day between prayer and devotions, domestic duties, public affairs, service to others, especially to those in need. She sought out the poor and unfortunate to help them; and established institutions throughout her kingdom, especially hospitals and orphanages, to aid those she could not personally reach.

She continued to love and respect her husband, bearing his neglect and infidelity with great patience. Denis, though a good ruler, was a bad subject; just, brave, generous, and compassionate in public life, but in his private relations, selfish and extravagant. When he fell seriously ill, she was constantly at his bedside. It may well have been her prayers and faithful devotion that brought about his sincere repentance before his death some months later. Denis and Isabel had two children, Alfonso and Constance. Alfonso succeeded his father as King.

Though Isabel retired to live a life of simplicity in a small home, she was often called upon to settle disputes between the rulers of that day. Her gentle nature and ability to reconcile prevented a great deal of bloodshed. In fact she was on another errand of reconciliation when, overcome by age and the extreme heat, she died on July 4, 1336.

February 27 - Friday, First Week of Lent

Want to find serenity? Move from self-reliance to God-reliance.

Ezekiel 18:21-28

The prophet says, repent and all will be well! Virtue means strength and life. Absence of virtue means weakness and eventual death. Ezekiel says, the Lord remembers virtuous life and forgets crimes of the past. You are called to live virtuous lives!

Psalm 130

**Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord,
Lord, hear my voice;
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication!**

Mathew 5:20-26

In this excerpt, Mathew offers us very challenging messages of Jesus:

- Your holiness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees! You are called to live higher standards of life. You are called to live virtuous lives!
- All forms of prayer and worship call forth reconciliation. Sacrifice and worship assume genuine confession of sin, true penitence and forgiveness from the heart. Be reconciled with others! Be reconciled now!
- Be aware of the words you speak. Be sensitive and speak affirming, encouraging, healing, supporting, empowering words!
- Be aware of words that may insult or hurt others. Words could alienate you from the community - they break down relationship. Speak words that bring life and not death.
- Make peace in time and make it now! Now is the time for reconciliation and peace!

Genuine Forgiveness is Unconditional. Learn to forgive from the heart!

Saint of the Day, February 27 - St. Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows and 11 other saints are remembered this day.

St. Gabriel was born into a large family in Italy in 1838 and was baptized Francesco Possenti. He lost his mother when he was only four years old. He was educated by the Jesuits. St. Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows wasn't always a saint. He was nicknamed "the dancer" before embracing the religious life. While attending the Jesuit College at Spoleto, he embraced whatever kind of entertainment he could find. He especially enjoyed the dancing scene and was nicknamed "the dancer." His friends also called him "il damerino" (the ladies' man) for his popularity among women.

Having been cured twice of serious illnesses, he came to believe that God was calling him to the religious life. Young Francis wished to join the Jesuits but was turned down, probably because of his age, not yet 17. Following the death of a sister to cholera, his resolve to enter religious life became even stronger and he was accepted by the Passionists. Upon entering the novitiate, he was given the name Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows.

Ever popular and cheerful, Gabriel quickly was successful in his effort to be faithful in little things. His spirit of prayer, love for the poor, consideration of the feelings of others, exact observance of the Passionist Rule as well as his bodily penances—always subject to the will of his wise superiors— made a deep impression on everyone.

His superiors had great expectations of Gabriel as he prepared for the priesthood, but after only four years of religious life symptoms of tuberculosis appeared. Ever obedient, he patiently bore the painful effects of the disease and the restrictions it required, seeking no special notice. He died peacefully on February 27, 1862, at age 24, having been an example to both young and old.

February 28 – Saturday, First Week of Lent

**Serenity comes from focusing on the present moment
and not on the anxieties, doubts and fears of the future.**

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

Obeying God's law is what makes us the "People of God". Moses tells his people that they are a people of the covenant, that they have an "agreement" with God and that God has an "agreement with them. Therefore, they must learn to "listen" to God's voice and remain faithful just as God is faithful.

Learn to walk in God's ways! You are a people sacred to the Lord.

Psalm 119

**Happy the person whose way is blameless,
who walks in the law of the Lord.
Happy are they, who observe his decrees,
who seek him with all their heart.**

Mathew 5:43-48

Mathew continues to bring us very high ideals that Jesus placed before his disciples. Your spirituality must rise above that of the scribes and Pharisees. Your life must be more virtuous than the pagans and do more than the pagans do.

Learn to lead noble and virtuous lives. Let your character reflect virtue.

Your love will prove that you are "sons of the heavenly Father". The heavenly Father is impartial to those who love him and to those who do not love him.

Let your love embrace all people – even those who do not love you!

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect! To be perfect is to be what God made you to be, do what God wants you to do and fulfill the plan, “the will” God has for you.

Listen and keep searching for God’s will for you! Be and become discerning people!

Saint of the Day, February 28 - St. Hilary (Pope) and 7 other saints are remembered this day.

Hilarius (Hilary) was born in Sardinia, Italy. No much is known about his early life. He was Pope from 461-468 and guardian of Church unity. As archdeacon under Pope Leo I, he fought vigorously for the rights of the Roman See.

In 449, Hilarius served as a legate for Pope Leo I at the Second Council of Ephesus. His opposition to the condemnation of Flavian of Constantinople incurred the enmity of Dioscurus of Alexandria, who attempted to prevent him from leaving the city. Hilarius was able to make his escape and returned to Rome by an indirect route. He later erected an oratory at the Lateran in honor of John the Evangelist, to whom he attributed his safe passage.

Much of his pontificate was spent in maintaining ecclesiastical discipline in conformity with canon law, and in settling jurisdictional disputes among the bishops of both Gaul and Spain. Hilary was used by Pope St. Leo I the Great on many assignments. When Leo died, Hilary was elected pope and consecrated on November 19, 461. He worked diligently to strengthen the Church in France and Spain, calling councils in 462 and 465. Hilary also rebuilt many Roman churches and erected the chapel of St. John Lateran. He also publicly rebuked Emperor Anthemius in St. Peter's for supporting the Macedonian heresy and sent a decree to the Eastern bishops validating the decisions of the General Councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. Hilary consolidated the Church in Sandi, Africa, and Gaul. He died in Rome on February 28, 468.

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