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Dear Friends of the Acres,

Sunday February 5 the First Reading was from Isaiah 58 *“Thus says the Lord, Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked and do not turn your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall be quickly healed; your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help and he will say: Here I am! If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday”*. We shall hear these words again on the Friday after Ash Wednesday when God tells us *“This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke, sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless”*, the reading again from Isaiah 58.

Later in that same week of February 5, we listened to the Gospel from Mark 7 when Jesus summoned the crowd and said to them, *“Nothing that enters those from the outside can make them impure; that which comes out of them, and only that, constitutes impurity. Let everyone heed what they hear”*.

During these days leading up to Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, we spend much time trying to figure out what we will give up – candy, dessert, etc. These disciplines are good but should not be our goal during the forty days leading up to Christ's passion and resurrection. Those of us who remember the days before Vatican II, we know about fasting. Remember those fast days when we could eat nothing between meals and we were only allowed one full meal a day, the other two to equal only one meal (Sundays did not apply). Then along came Vatican II and the fast days were eased, now only down to Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. We thought this is going to be a lot easier. But then we learned that the Church was moving from what was more negative to a more positive approach to Lent. That we were encouraged to do helpful things to our neighbors. Stop in and visit an elderly person, perhaps shovel their walk, visit the sick, and those imprisoned. Perhaps be a part of a prayer group that has their focus on folks in the parish that need a helping hand or a shoulder to cry on. Some may even do missionary work in El Salvador or Guatemala, or help in an area suffering damage from storms of many sorts. Most of us are reluctant to go so far as that, but we can all be more aware of the many who suffer from poverty and homelessness. How about the refugees in our towns and those now who are so worried about being deported.

Our Bishop is telling us we must be supportive of these folks. That not to be is un-Christian, is un-American. At a special Mass at the Cathedral on February 5, Bishop Cunningham said *“We cannot tolerate racial and religious injustice. We must stand with our refugees. He points out that Isaiah connects the people's actions on behalf of the oppressed and afflicted with Israel's future well-being. Their glorious time begins when they care for those in need.”* Pope Francis several months ago reminds us not to forget the flesh of Christ is in the flesh of refugees: their flesh is the flesh of Christ. And so as we approach the holy season of Lent, let us be aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ who face being forced from their homes, and let us not only pray for them but let those in power know that we stand by them in solidarity. Following in Jesus' footsteps is not easy but we must follow the *“Way of the Cross”*. That is the fast that is expected of us.

Peg McCarthy

LENTEN PRAYER - REPENTENCE:
HAVE MERCY ON US LORD FOR WE HAVE
SINNED

"...In an acceptable time, I heard you...on the day of Salvation, I helped you...NOW is the acceptable time; NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION!" (2 Cor 6:2 - Ash Wednesday.)

"GIVE US BACK THE JOY OF YOUR
SALVATION, AND A WILLING SPIRIT
SUSTAIN IN US". (Psalm 51)

Lord, through Lent and in our lives, we pray, "If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Help us to hear Your voice, And to follow it.

Father Jones