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Minister's Message Lorna Miressi, ofsf

Brothers and Sisters,
Peace and All Good! Soon we will be entering the reflective season of Lent. This solemn season of the Church Year gives us all an opportunity to slow down a bit (or a lot if we are able) and turn our thoughts inward, examine our conscience and reconcile ourselves back to our Lord. Every year we hear the call: "Return to me with your whole heart" (Joel 2:12). Why? Because the Lord is "gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting in punishment" (Joel 2:13).

One of the most helpful ways of experiencing the goodness and mercy of God is to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If you are nervous about this, try picturing God as your loving Father who is eager to embrace you and welcome you back to him, giving you comfort and the ability to confess your sins to and find peace.

In the Lent 2019 edition of the Word Among Us I found a very helpful examination of conscience meant to prepare us for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It reads as follow:

LOSS OF HARMONY WITH GOD

- Does God have first place in my life, or do other interests or obligations take all my time and attention?
- How have I pursued a stronger relationship with God? Do I pray every day? Do I receive the sacraments faithfully?
- Have I fallen short of giving God the respect he's due or taken God's name in vain?

"Return to me," God says. "Let me bring you into my heart of love."

LOSS OF HARMONY WITH EACH OTHER

- Do I see the value and dignity in each person? How do I treat people who don't agree with me or who treat me badly?
- Have I tried to steal recognition that was due to someone else or take credit for something I didn't do?
- Do I give in to anger or frustration with the people close to me? Do I lose my temper or insult people?

"Return to me," God says. "Let my mercy teach you to be merciful."

A CLOUDED MIND

- Do I trust in God's goodness? Or do I try to satisfy my desires all by myself?
- Do I look to material possessions to make me happy? Am I generous with my money and time?
- Do I engage in impure thoughts or fantasies? Do I act on them?
- Is my mind occupied with resentful thoughts from past hurts?

"Return to me," God says. "Let me heal your divided, conflicted mind"

(From The Word Among Us, Lent 2019, pgs. 22-23)

Peace!
Lorna

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REGIONAL CALENDAR

2018/19

All events are at Mayslake Village unless otherwise noted

~~December Chapter of Elections
December 8~~

~~Saturday January 19th /26th
Regional Executive Council
Meeting/Afternoon retreat~~

Date TBD
PerCapita/Census/Fraternity reports due

~~Saturday March 9th
Regional Executive Council
Meeting~~

~~Sat/Sun Mar. 16th/17th
Candidates' Retreat~~

Saturday May 18th
Chapter of Ministers

Saturday July 13th
Regional Executive Council Meeting

Saturday August 3rd
Regional Gathering - Feast of the Portiuncula

Saturday Sept 14th
Formation Leadership Workshop

Saturday October 5th
Regional Executive Council Meeting

Date TBD
NAFRA Chapter - Date and Location TBA

Sunday Nov. 10th
Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration - Location TBA

**Spiritual Assistant
Bro. Marc Scheckells ofm**

Genesis 1:27 shares, "God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." At face value, this declaration seems rather innocuous. God is the creator and we are the creation. But when one looks a bit deeper, a serious question begins to emerge: In what way is humanity made in God's image? This topic is challenging because the Bible, although bound with all sorts of exceptional insight and wisdom, does not elaborate on this concept of *Imago Dei*. Like a child who throws a water balloon in the air and then runs away, the Bible projects the idea into our consciousness but does not go into great detail about what this concept actually means.

For centuries it was understood that intellect and reason were how humanity partook in the image of God. Because human beings were able to think rationally, use tools, and possess emotions, it was reasoned that these facilities were what separate human beings from the beasts of the earth. Interestingly, modern science has shown us many animals have very similar aptitudes. If anyone has kept a cat, one knows how emotionally charged these beasts can be! Additionally, science has been proven that animals, including elephants and monkeys, mourn the members of their group that die. Interestingly, many animals, including birds and rodents, use

tools to catch prey. These insights, that animals also have complex emotions and the limited ability to reason, have tested this understanding that intellect and reason are possessed solely by human beings.

Perhaps the best conclusion is that we share in God's ability to dominate over the rest of creation. We have the ability to use creation for our application and at our convenience. Since the industrial revolution, this capacity to dominate nature and utilize it for our gain has become a significant dilemma. The problem is not about our ability to dominate over the earth, but our responsibility toward creation as a whole. Like God, who keeps his covenant with us, we have an obligation to protect, promote, and care for creation. The Creator has created everything and, by virtue of this link, we share a common connection with all of creation. This bond means that people are not greater than the rest of creation, but that we are called to be in a relationship with creation and, since we are made in God's image, share in the duty of caring for creation.

As I reflect on this, I cannot help but think of Saint Francis. He had a vision of creation that mirrored this modern theological understanding of *Imago Dei*. In connecting to all of creation as "brother" and "sister," Francis demonstrated that he understood the relationships that unite all of creation. Additionally, Francis appreciated those bonds and used whatever influence he had to defend and promote the fair treatment of creation. It appears that Francis was well aware that God created everything and that

**In-Formation –
Barb Creagh ofs, Regional Formation
Commission
IN FORMATION**

As we enter this Holy season of Lent, we are called to follow St. Francis who observed a number of fasts throughout the year. The three pillars of our Lenten journey are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Pope Francis states, "Once again, the Pasch of the Lord draws near! In our preparation for Easter, God in His providence offers us each year the season of Lent as a "sacramental sign of our conversion" .[1] Lent summons us, and enables us, to come back to the Lord wholeheartedly and in every aspect of our life." [2]

"By devoting more time to *prayer*, we enable our hearts to root out our secret lies and forms of self-deception,[5] and then to find the consolation God offers. He is our Father and he wants us to live life well." [2]

Sometimes illness or life's stressors leave us overwhelmed and struggling to pray. Yet, when we are suffering, whether it is physical suffering or emotional challenges, engaging the suffering becomes our activity for the moment [3]...and becomes our prayer.

We are called to quiet the external noise of our world and our technology to enter more deeply into the presence of God always dwelling within us. Taking the time to reflect on how deeply God loves us even when we struggle to love ourselves. How powerful is the message that we are loved into being and continue to be in God's love.

"*Almsgiving* sets us free from greed and helps us to regard our neighbor as a brother or sister. What I possess is never mine alone. How I would like almsgiving to become a genuine style of life for each of us! How I would like us, as Christians, to follow the example of the Apostles and see in the sharing of our possessions a tangible witness of the communion that is ours in the Church! For this reason, I echo Saint Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians to take up

A collection for the community of Jerusalem as something from which they themselves would benefit (cf. 2 Cor 8:10). This is all the more fitting during the Lenten season, when many groups take up collections to assist Churches and peoples in need. Yet I would also hope that, even in our daily encounters with those who beg for our assistance, we would see such requests as coming from God Himself. When we give alms, we share in God's providential care for each of His children. If through me God helps someone today, will He not tomorrow provide for my own needs? For no one is more generous than God".[6] [2]

Even when we may feel that we have limited means or little to give, there is the importance of giving of oneself, of your time and your talents. It can be as simple as showing respect for others; remaining present without judgment for those with whom we disagree, or taking time to listen to the stories of others that give meaning to life.

"*Fasting* weakens our tendency to violence; it disarms us and becomes an important opportunity for growth. On the one hand, it allows us to experience what the destitute and the starving have to endure. On the other hand, it expresses our own spiritual hunger and thirst for life in God. Fasting wakes us up. It makes us more attentive to God and our neighbor. It revives our desire to obey God, who alone is capable of satisfying our hunger." [2]

"We must be careful not to practice a formal fast, or one which in truth 'satisfies' us because it makes us feel good about ourselves. Fasting makes sense if it questions our security, and if it also leads to some benefit for others, if it helps us to cultivate the style of the Good Samaritan, who bends down to his brother in need and takes care of him." [4]

"But when we fast from the indifference of iniquity, we can begin to feast on love. In fact, Lent is the perfect time to learn how to love again. Jesus – the great protagonist of this holy season – certainly showed us the way. In him, God descends all the way down to bring
(continued on page 4)

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

Luana Lienhart ofs

Sisters and brothers, the mosque shootings in New Zealand broke something in me. I wept, prayed, fasted and wept some more. Upon reflection, I think my reaction was in response to the evil of the act itself, but also that I think it will, inevitably, happen here as well. Maybe the reason I can't find peace about this is because sin is supposed to be uncomfortable. It's supposed to hurt and compel us to action.

We must stand shoulder to shoulder with all our brothers and sisters, especially the marginalized and oppressed. There's no better time to be more intentional about this than in Lent. May God, who began this great work in us, bring it to completion.

These are my last words to you as your JPIC Councilor. Mike Huck, OFS, has taken up the mantle and I'm so excited to see how he uses his gifts in union with the Holy Spirit, to aid us in our ongoing formation and conversion. Please join me in praying for him. 📖

(Formation continued from page 3) everyone up. In his life and his ministry, no one is excluded.

'What are you giving up for Lent?' It's a question a lot of people will get these next few days. If you want to change your body, perhaps alcohol and candy is the way to go. But if you want to change your heart, a harder fast is needed. This narrow road is gritty, but it isn't sterile. It will make room in ourselves to experience a love that can make us whole and set us free."

[1] Roman Missal, Collect for the First Sunday of Lent (Italian)

[2] Message of the Holy Father Francis for Lent 2018, 06.02.2018.

[3] Bach, Lester OFM, Cap, The Franciscan Journey: embracing the Franciscan vision, Smoky Valley Printing; Lindsborg, KS, 2010 p. 299.

[4] Pope Francis, Homily, March 5, 2014

[5] Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Spe Salvi, 33.

[6] Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter Fidei Donum, III.

[4] Pope Francis, Homily, March 5, 2014

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(Spiritual Assistant cont. from page 2)

everything exists in relationship with God. He did not worship creation but appreciated that creation, including all plants and animals, offers insights about God's love. He recognized that creation, as a whole, moves with gratitude and glory toward the creator and that human beings could learn from this innate desire of nature.

It seems, to be honest, that Francis was not only ahead of his time, but much better at recognizing what it means to be made in the image of God than many people realize! May we, as disciples of Saint Francis, be dedicated to always see God's goodness in all of creation and respectfully employ our role as the caretakers of our planet! 📖

