

St. Gregory of Nazianzus said, "We must remember God more often than we draw breath." The Catechism quotes Gregory and then adds, "But we cannot pray 'at all times' if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it." That is our great task for Lent. The greatest prayer is our participation in the Mass – the renewal of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. During Lent I invite you to not only "keep holy the Lord's Day" by attending Sunday Mass, but to also come to 9 a.m. daily Mass (see the bulletin cover or our online parish calendar for schedule of Masses – and other prayer services during Lent). Beyond Mass we have other services, such as Stations of the Cross (Friday evenings), communal rosary and other forms of prayer. This coming Wednesday our Generations of Faith will focus on the prayer that Jesus taught us, the Our Father. It contains the essential petitions we address to God. If you have not yet attended Generations of Faith, I encourage you to make a special effort as we begin Lent. The evening begins with dinner at 5:45 p.m.

This Lent we have the opportunity to join other Christians in Snohomish County in an important prayer: **40 Days for Life**. A good number of St. Mary parishioners have signed up for an hour of prayer in front of the Everett Planned Parenthood abortion clinic. You can sign up online. (<http://www.40daysforlife.com/Everett/>) or by contacting Dom & Alicia Thomeyer or Oscar & Maria Rodriguez. Also Abby Jacopo is organizing St. Mary Youth for a vigil prayer. I invite you to join me this Thursday afternoon from 3 to 4 p.m. We will peacefully pray the mysteries of the rosary.

Some ask: Why do we pray in front of Planned Parenthood? When I was at Holy Family, Planned Parenthood opened a facility located eight blocks away from our church. I met with our parish Respect Life Committee to discuss our response. After prayer and research, I sent the following letter to the clinic's director:

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Respect Life Committee of Holy Family Parish. Beginning this month we will be conducting peaceful, non-violent prayer vigils on the sidewalk in front of your facility. In doing so, we are exercising our freedom as citizens to engage in lawful protest. We make no judgment on the intentions of those who work at Planned Parenthood, but we are concerned about certain aspects of the organization:

- *It is the largest abortion provider in the United States – and throughout the world.*
- *It vigorously promotes the contraceptive life-style to those married and unmarried, to adults and to youth. An example of this is the coupon you sent to local residents offering one year of free contraception to certain categories of people.*
- *It uses deceptive advertising, such as calling the "Morning after Pill" emergency contraception, when in fact it can take effect after conception, thus destroying a newly conceived human.*
- *Historically Planned Parenthood has tended to target minorities, opening clinics in neighborhoods like ours which have significant minority populations.*
- *It provides abortion and birth control to minors without informing their parents, thus creating an additional division between parent and child.*
- *It has covered up cases of statutory rape.*

These claims are well documented – and we would be most willing to discuss any of them with you. At the same time, we are ready to help young people recognize there are alternatives to abortion and the contraceptive lifestyle. We – and other Christian churches in the area - would do our utmost to assist them so that they might have a genuine choice.

If you wish further information or desire to discuss any aspect of this letter, please feel free to call me...

I received no response from the letter, although I have had opportunity to discuss these concerns with some who call themselves “pro-choice.” As Christians we want to meet others on the deepest level: not politics and polemics, but prayer and solidarity with those who are suffering. In that spirit, I invite you to join me and others in the **40 Days for Life** prayer. Even if you do not join us on the sidewalk, please join us in your heart and in your home. Our goal is not so much to make abortion illegal, but to create a society where taking a tiny baby’s life is unthinkable. Creating such a society is a great task, requiring much prayer and sacrifice. It begins with each person discerning his or her vocation, and asking God’s strength to fulfill that call.

I conclude by thanking our married couples for their vocation and for renewing their vows last Sunday (World Marriage Day). Below is a picture of some of the couples at the 9:30 a.m. Mass and of Javier and Reyna Gutierrez receiving an anniversary blessing at the noon Mass. (You can find other pictures by going to our parish website, <http://www.stmaryvalley.org/>, and scrolling down to “Parish Photo Album.”) May God bless our married couples – and all of us in living out his call.



