

This Wednesday we begin the season of Lent. Lent comes very late this year, but it seems like no matter how much lead time I have, it still catches me off guard.

The Internet has many websites that discuss the significance of **Ash Wednesday** and **Lent**. One that I found particularly helpful is “Mary’s Aggies” – as the name indicates, a group of Catholic students at Texas A & M. They have a LENT FAQ that I posted on the bulletin board. You can find it at: <http://holywhapping.blogspot.com/2009/03/marys-aggies-annual-lenten-mega-post.html> They answer questions such as: What is Lent? Why forty days and not some other number? What is Ash Wednesday all about? Why are ashes made into a cross on the forehead? Why abstain from meat? Why is fish not considered meat? In addition to these questions, they make Lenten suggestions for increased prayer, almsgiving and fasting. For example: fast from snacking or candy, TV, Facebook/internet, the radio in your car. And they mention things that a person can fast from – and continue to give up: speeding, sarcasm, pornography and complaining.

Bishop Sheen observed the downward tendency of human nature. None of us can stay in one place: **If we are not consciously and deliberately advancing to God, we begin to decline.** For that reason we need this season of Lent. On Ash Wednesday we will hear God’s invitation, “return to me with your whole heart.” The ashes we receive are an ancient sign of being marked by Christ in our baptism. We are no longer our own, but Jesus Christ owns us. The book of Revelation tells us that all the elect will be marked by the sign of Christ - "On Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." (Rev 14:1)

On Ash Wednesday and on the six Fridays of Lent, we abstain from meat. That small sacrifice helps unite us with Jesus’ Passion. Our World Youth Day delegation invites you to **Lenten Soup Nights** beginning this Friday at 5:30 p.m. in our parish hall. After the soup supper we will have Stations of the Cross and Rosary in the church.

The day before Ash Wednesday is known as Mardi Gras (literally “Fat Tuesday”) because it was last opportunity for a high-cholesterol meal before the austerity of Lent. A better way to celebrate Mardi Gras is to come to the **40 Days for Life Kick-Off Rally** at the Everett Knights of Columbus Hall (2913 W. Marine View Drive) from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. For information on how you can participate in this round-the-clock Lenten prayer, please google Everett 40 Days for Life - Spring 2011.

This Saturday we have the **Marriage Workshop** with Dr. Robert Fontana. I have placed fliers at the church entrances and encourage engaged and married couples (as well as single young adults) to attend.

Last weekend we signed up 46 people for the **Theology of the Body Retreat** on March 19. I neglected to emphasize that we need adults to assist some of those 46 people. So far we have only three adults besides Sr. Barbara and myself. We need help, especially with car pool which will leave St. Mary of the Valley by 7 a.m. on the 19th. If you can help with transportation,

please contact Sr. Barbara or me. It will be a great day not only for our young people, but also for the adults who accompany them.

Speaking of young people, here are a couple of pictures (courtesy of Teresa Ascherl) from the blessing of the **Eagle Scout project** last Sunday. I am proud of all those who worked with Nathan Johnson to landscape the area around the Shrine of Our Lady of the Valley.

Finally please set aside the evening of March 22 for an important ecumenical event – the premiere of **Appalachian Dawn** at the Monroe Galaxy. As you will notice in the posters on our bulletin boards, the movie is “PG-13,” suitable for adults and mature teens but it deals with difficult issues of drugs, physical abuse and suicide. It is too intense for small children, but for older teens and adults it is an inspiring film that can help us think about how, together with other Christians, we can confront the evils that are destroying children and families in the communities of our valley. Admission is free.



