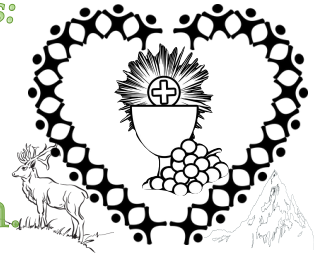


Our Current Weekend Mass Schedule for the Elk Valley is:

**Fernie on Saturday evening at 5pm,
Sparwood at 9am Sunday morning,
and Elkford at 4pm Sunday afternoon.**



The Sunday Mass is broadcast via Zoom from Fernie & Sparwood (see below).

26th/27th February 2022

Dear All,

I am writing this on Thursday morning and I am somewhat tired. Last night I was following the news into the small hours and I was awake at 6am to again listen to the news that is coming to us from Ukraine. My heart goes out to those poor people who are now hearing bombs go off and missiles flying overhead.

Pope Francis

Vatican News is reporting that during his General Audience on Wednesday – *before the Russian invasion got fully underway* – Pope Francis made a heartfelt appeal for peace in Ukraine, saying that the threat of war had caused “great pain in my heart... Despite the diplomatic efforts of the last few weeks, increasingly alarming scenarios are opening up,” with many people all over the world feeling anguish and pain. “Once again the peace of all is threatened by partisan interests,” he stressed.

Pope Francis appealed to those “with political responsibility to examine their consciences seriously before God, who is the God of peace and not of war, who is the Father of all, not just of some, who wants us to be brothers and not enemies.” He also prayed that “all the parties involved refrain from any action that would cause even more suffering to the people, destabilising coexistence between nations and bringing international law into disrepute.”

Prayer and fasting for peace

Speaking at the end of the General Audience, Pope Francis invited everyone to make Ash Wednesday – this coming Wednesday, 2nd March – a Day of Fasting for Peace. He said, “I encourage believers in a special way to dedicate themselves intensely to prayer and fasting on that day. May the Queen of Peace preserve the world from the madness of war.”



Bishop Mark in Britain

This morning I have received from Bp. Mark, my bishop in England the following,

“I am sure that we have all been disturbed by the recent events taking place in Ukraine. I would be grateful if, in our parishes this weekend, you could mark this solemn moment by offering a time of prayer to pray for peace in Ukraine and for all those who are suffering as a result of the war now being waged there. Please also include this intention in the Prayers of the Faithful on Saturday/Sunday.

He then asks us to include the following in our intercessions at Mass:

We remember the people of Ukraine in these dark days for their country: we pray for a restoration of peace and for the conversion of hearts of those focused on war, so that democracy and peaceful coexistence are fully established soon.

He also joins the Pope in asking for Ash Wednesday to be a day of prayer and fasting for peace.

Archbishop Sviatoslav from Kiev, Ukraine

Bp. Mark has also forwarded us a message from Archbishop Sviatoslav, the Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Kyiv, Ukraine, and was written on Tuesday of this week. He writes,

We are convinced that the world cannot develop and find answers for the challenges of today by resorting to might and violence, by showing disdain for shared human values and the truth of the Gospel. I call upon all people of good will to not ignore the suffering of the Ukrainian people, brought on by Russian military aggression. We are a people who love peace. And precisely for that reason we are ready to defend it and fight for it.

Today we call out in prayer to the Almighty Creator, with a special appeal for wisdom for those entrusted with making important decisions for society, in whose hands lies the fate of humanity. We ask the Heavenly Father for assistance in restoring a just peace on Ukrainian land.

We pray especially for those who defend Ukraine, who in these days are for us an example of loving sacrifice and dedicated service to their people. May the merciful Lord protect them from every danger and crown their efforts with the victory of truth and good.

We call for the gracious blessing of a loving God and Creator upon Ukraine and its people!

The blessing of the Lord be upon you.

+Sviatoslav

Ukrainian Catholic Church

Last weekend we had a Deacon and his family visiting Fernie from the Ukrainian Catholic community in Edmonton. This morning I wrote to Deacon Cyril offering him, his family and his faith community our prayers and support. He replied,

Many thanks for your prayers, and those of your community.... Events in Ukraine are troubling for me, both because of my personal connections there and because my church was illegal between 1946 and 1989, and Putin, a former KGB agent, will certainly view the Ukrainian Catholic Church as a fifth column in need of elimination, or at the very least, stifling control.

Deacon Cyril.

These thoughts certainly spurred me on in my prayers for the people of Ukraine.

A New Iron Curtain

The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said today (Thursday),

“What we have heard today are not just missile blasts, fighting and the rumble of aircraft. This is the sound of a new iron curtain, which has come down and is closing Russia off from the civilised world”

He went on to say, “Our national task is to make sure this curtain does not fall across our land.”, and as we pray for all the individuals caught up in this conflict, we do also pray that our world will move towards openness and peace rather than the closing of a curtain and war. The President’s statement reminded me of a paragraph from Pope Frances’ encyclical letter of 2020 ‘Fratelli Tutti’,

27. Paradoxically, we have certain ancestral fears... As a result, new walls are erected for self-preservation, the outside world ceases to exist and leaves only “my” world, to the point that others, no longer considered human beings possessed of an inalienable dignity, become only “them”. Once more, we encounter “the temptation to build a culture of walls, to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land, in order to prevent this encounter with other cultures, with other people. And those who raise walls will end up as slaves within the very walls they have built. They are left without horizons, for they lack this interchange with others”.

And the Pope ended his encyclical with “A Prayer to the Creator”

*Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter, dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognise the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. **Amen.***

Hopefully all this will give you enough material to be able to pray that any ‘iron curtain’ that is erected will soon be torn down in a similar fashion to the last ‘iron curtain’, and as we hear of hundreds of Ukrainians being killed, we hold all the people of Ukraine in our prayers.

And I must also say that I am sure that a lot of the young foot soldiers in the Russian army joined that army because, with the difficult economic situation of many parts of Russia, they just wanted to job to get some money for their families, and those soldiers are also sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and parents to others who love them. So even as they are bring asked to be the aggressors in a dreadful conflict, we recognise also their humanity.



Times of Services for Ash Wednesday

Lent start this Wednesday, 2nd March. And as we see the pictures that are coming to us from Ukraine it reminds us that Lent is a time when we share in suffering and abandonment of Christ in order to leave worldly values behind and embrace the values of self-giving love.

For Ash Wednesday there will be one service in Sparwood and one in Fernie, plus Rocky Mountain Village will also have Mass on Ash Wednesday (*but currently visitors are not allowed into the Village*). For Elkford, Ashes will be distributed at the Sunday Mass on 6th March. So the times are:

Sparwood	– 7pm Tuesday 1st March
Fernie	– 7pm Wednesday 2nd March
Elkford	– Ashes on Sunday 6th March

The Masses from Sparwood and Fernie will be broadcast on Zoom using the same link as our normal weekend Masses.

Looking Forward to the Gift of Lent

Again this week I have added an appendix which is looking at how we might fruitfully approach the season of Lent and make it into a time of blessings. This is meant to be read as a follow-on from what I wrote last week. I am not finished yet – there is a little more to come next week talking about being green for Lent!

Sadness in Elkford

Recently we have lost two leading parishioners in Elkford, Neil Pelletier and Mike Shinnars. Both were much loved and were stalwarts in the parish. So they will leave a big hole in many people's hearts and in our life and activities as a parish. May they rest in peace and we also hold St. Bernard's parish in our prayers.

And Finally...

Thumper hit on a new idea this week; he thought, perhaps if I make myself look really cute he won't throw me off the sofa!

With prayers,

Fr. David & Thumper



Our churches are open to those *without* any Covid symptoms.
But Covid is still a real threat – thus caution is needed!



Zoom Links – To Our Masses

Link to Weekend & Ash Wednesday Masses *(it is the same link for all Mass)*

Fr. David is inviting you to be part of our weekend & Ash Wednesday Masses

To get the link to our two weekend Masses please send an e-mail to one of our parish offices with your name and you will then receive the link each week.

info@holyfamillyfernie.ca

ElkValleyRC@gmail.com

Audio Only

Don't forget, if you don't have the internet but have a phone you can still listen to Mass via a phone call to our Zoom link.

Again, e-mail the office for the link for this.

Chat:

Feel free to greet people via the chat when you join our broadcast, and if you are praying for anything particular, do share this with others on the Chat.

Normally there is "LA - Chat (Co-Host)" who watches the chat for any problems or prayer intentions. If you don't want everyone to see your message you can send your message directly and it will remain private.

Waiting Room:

Please note when you log on you will be put in a "waiting room". Hopefully as soon as we see you waiting we will let you in. If there is a bit of a delay, please just wait; we will be with you as quickly as we can.

And for those who are attending church in person, be careful:

Please continue to be careful when you are in church. Please sanitise your hands, wear a mask at all times, always think of the good of others. As you move about in church you might come within a 'breath distance' of others, and be conscious that others might have health vulnerabilities that you don't know about.

Everyone still needs to be careful.



Looking Forward to the Gift of Lent

Lent starts on Wednesday and I hope you are excited about this special season.

Last week I tried to look at how we might incorporate stillness or even silence into our prayer life during Lent. Prayer is a time of coming to God, and if we spend our whole time in prayer telling God how to be God, then we are missing out on the great gift of God's guidance to us.

As Christians we believe that God comes to us not only in individual prayer, but we put a special emphasis on communal prayer. Now we have to understand exactly what communal prayer is, and very particularly, what it is not.

Communal prayer is not a lot of people all being in the same place at the same time praying individually, rather it is a lot of people coming together as 'one body'.

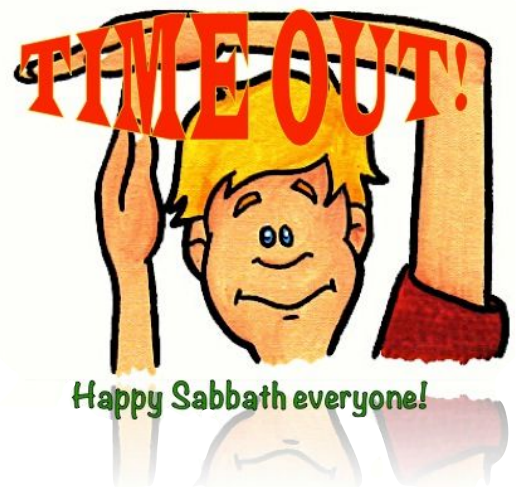
This can have a number of aspects to it.

Personally I am still haunted by a childhood image of heaven that I picked up from somewhere. It is a vision of all the saints – all the faithful souls who have died – standing together, all identically dressed, all looking pretty much the same (of course because they are all dressed in white robes), all gazing upon God and singing in harmony, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts". This image is stuck in my mind and is so negative because I don't see myself in this vast multitude, and

if I think really hard and push myself into the picture, it is a very unhappy me standing there because this model of heaven contains so many things that I hate: Uniformity for one! I am only going to be part of that heavenly throng if I can wear bear feet and have shorts on under the white robe! Or more seriously, I am sure God created each one of us in the image of Christ, but also made each of us unique, and that uniqueness will go with us to heaven.

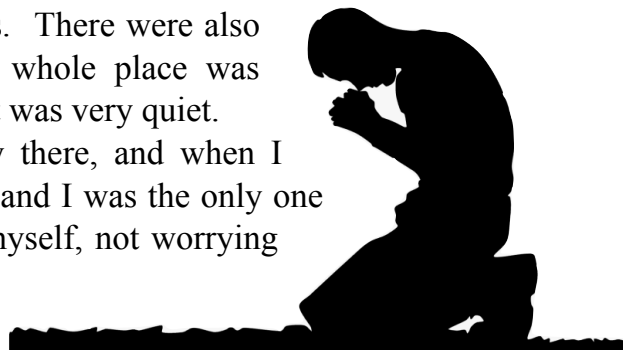
When I was five we had a school play and our teacher got us all to sing a song, then as we sang she went along the line and listened to each of us and she told myself and Paul Brewster not to sing but just to mime! So if I am in this heavenly chorus will St. Peter come along and quietly whisper in my ear that I should mime?

No! That is not my image of heaven. And as I push away this image of uniformity in heaven so I loose the idea that communal prayer as perfect uniformity.



So What is Communal Prayer?

There was another very formative moment that I had when I was at seminary [priests' training college]. Some of my time at seminary was easy, but often I found it difficult and I struggled. The college was an old brick building with an extensive basement to it, and the students had converted one of the areas in the basement into a prayer chapel with the Blessed Sacrament reserved in a tabernacle. The ceilings were very low so we had to kneel or sit on the floor and there were a number of pillows to assist with this. There were also some beautiful icons around the walls, so the whole place was lovely, and being the basement with stone walls, it was very quiet. I would often go down to this chapel and pray there, and when I arrived I would be really pleased if it was empty and I was the only one there. This meant that I could pray and forget myself, not worrying about if I was sitting up straight, or if I was looking prayerful, or if I was moving too often and making a noise. And this was great.



But then times came when things were more difficult for me in my formation, and times when it was harder to pray. It was at these times that a change happened: I would go to the chapel and I would be so please if there *was* someone else in their praying. There were times when I had no words left and I felt that I just couldn't pray, and at those moments being with someone who could pray was such a gift. I remember imagining their prayers rising up to heaven, and as I struggled to connect with God I would mentally try to throw a spiritual fishing line towards their stream of prayers and imagine my prayers being taken up to heaven hooked onto the other person's prayers. As I felt so inadequate in my prayer, being surrounded by others who were praying gave me great comfort.

Indeed, in many ways this was exactly the reverse of my experience in the primary school play. At primary school I was told that I was no good at singing so I should be quiet so I didn't spoil it for others; here I knew I was no good at praying but that was okay, others could pray so they made my spiritual groans into prayers by carrying them up to God for me!

I think I have previously related the story of how when I was a hospital chaplain I often used to turn up at 6:30am at the convent for the early morning Mass having been working all night thus I was simply exhausted with nothing to give, and the prayer of the nuns got me through Mass. It wasn't that they were all praying the rosary or some other devotion, they were praying the Mass and it was tangible. This experience of communal prayer was so profound that when Covid struck and I was alone in church I really struggled to celebrate Mass without a congregation because I was so used to being with other people when I prayed the Mass.

Thus my starting point for 'communal prayer' is being able to see the prayer of those around us as a gift, even when it is silent prayer. And with this in mind I am proposing to do something very slightly different at our Masses during Lent – to add a little silence, a little bit of praying together in silence, a little bit of 'Sabbath'!

Breaking of Bread

I think I have said a number of times that one of the most profound moments for me during the Mass is the breaking of bread, that is, just before Communion when the priest lifts up the now consecrated large Host and breaks it into many parts. Luke tells us that on the first day of the week after Jesus had risen from the dead, the disciples were walking to a town called Emmaus, and Jesus came and walked beside them. Then Luke tells us,

When he [Jesus] was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him...

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together... Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (See Luke 24:30-35)

So too at Mass, as the bread is broken we recognise Christ amongst us and we declare, “Lamb of God...”

And there is this marvellous imagery of Jesus letting himself be broken so that we can be whole; and now this same Jesus under the appearance of bread letting himself be broken into pieces so we can become the one body of Christ.

The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

During Covid when I celebrated Mass on my own in the church I would stop at this point. I would look on the broken Host and think, “It’s okay, God sees your brokenness and makes you whole by letting himself be broken.” And I would be

aware that in the taking of this bread I was not only becoming one with Christ who was now coming to me in the Eucharist, but I was also becoming one with everyone else who would be sharing in the ‘one bread’, even if they were unable to be in Church with me. And whatever my frailty, I was united with others and with Christ.

In an odd sort of way, for me meditating on the ‘broken bread’ was even more powerful than just meditating on Christ choosing to come to us in the Eucharist. I think the ‘broken bread’ is a more active image, and I am not trying to imagine the perfect Christ, but the Christ who is willing to be taken as a ‘no one’, as a common criminal, just so He can stand beside me.



Pausing Before Communion

So what I propose to do during our Masses in Lent is to get to the breaking of bread and the singing (or saying) of the Lamb of God, and after this to then stop for a minute to be in the presence of the Lamb of God.

In this time I will try ***not*** to say anything in my prayer, I will try ***not*** to tell Jesus what he needs to do or what he needs to know, but I will try just to be in awe.

When I was up north in Chetwynd and Tumbler Ridge we did this one Lent at our weekday Mass. As we had some very holy nuns in the parish, at the Lamb of God every one knelt down, but we didn't pause just for a minute or so, we paused for five minutes! And I have to say that I loved this. But at a Sunday Mass I am conscious that the transition from standing to kneeling is hard for many, and I don't want to add an extra burden, and five minutes is great for holy nuns, but I wonder if we should – certainly to start with – just pause for a minute or so.

Let's see how it goes. Please give me feedback on what you think after we have tried it out a couple of times. *(And I really, really hope that I don't go into automatic mode and forget to pause!!! I will have to write myself a note.)*

This week someone said to me about how when watching Mass from home there can be so many distractions, and these don't have to be things actively intruding into this time of prayer, but just looking around and seeing the washing machine and being reminded that there is still a whole pile of washing to be done can be a distraction. So again, we keep our expectations low. If things encroach, we just press the reset button and let our prayer reboot.

Taking This Into Our Week

Question: What are you doing for Lent?

Answer: I am stopping for one minute during Mass!

Okay, that isn't so impressive, thus we shouldn't stop there. Rather we should try to take this moment of stillness and awe out into our week. Perhaps every time we pause during the week, we might be aware that the point of the pause is to let Christ in, the Christ we meet at Mass. As during the week we push out of our lives a bit of noise or busyness we might be aware that we are making space for Christ to come to the brokenness of our everyday lives; and as we try to make a moment of silence in our day to listen to God, we might know that we are not alone.

I hope this idea helps some people in some small way.

With thanks,

Fr. David

