

# ST MARY'S CHURCH



14833 Kutztown Road ▪ Kutztown, PA 19530

[www.StMarysKutztown.com](http://www.StMarysKutztown.com)

[www.facebook.com/stmaryskutztown](https://www.facebook.com/stmaryskutztown)

Church, Meeting Rooms, Business & Parish Offices:

Phone : 610-683-7443 ▪ Fax : 610-683-7625

Email: [Parish@StMarysKutztown.com](mailto:Parish@StMarysKutztown.com)

Religious Education Center: 610-683-6454

Email: [RelEd@StMarysKutztown.com](mailto:RelEd@StMarysKutztown.com)

## PASTORAL MINISTRY

Pastor	Fr John Maria
Pastor Emeritus	Rev. Msgr Walter T Scheaffer
Transitional Deacon	Rev. Mr. N. Romero Brelinsky
Permanent Deacon	Dcn. Howard Schultz
Coordinator/Religious Educ	Mrs. Ann Pergosky
Director of Music Ministry and Parish Secretary	Mrs. Anne Sitarik

## PARISH ORGANIZATIONS

Ladies Auxiliary	Theresa Bieak & Deb Massa
Men of St. Mary's	Mr. Tom Cengeri
Pro-Life Committee	Mr. John Tucker, O P
R C I A	Fr. John Maria

## DIOCESAN INFORMATION

Diocesan Policies and Procedures on Youth Protection:

[www.allentowndiocese.org](http://www.allentowndiocese.org)

Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator:

Wendy S Krisak, Direct Telephone: (800) 791-9209

Office of Safe Environment Secretary, Youth Protection and Catholic Human Services: Pamela Russo, MSW, MS ; PO Box F, Allentown, 181-5-1538 Tele. 610-871-5200 x2204

Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service: If you have an allegation of abuse against a bishop, please contact the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service:

[www.ReportBishopAbuse.org](http://www.ReportBishopAbuse.org) or 800-276-1562

A leper came to him begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean."

Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him. "I do will it. Be made clean." *Mark 1:40-41*

## **MASS SCHEDULE**

Saturday Vigil	4:30 pm
Sunday	8:30, 11:00am
Daily Masses	7:30am (Monday – Friday) 8:00am (First Saturdays)

## **ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT** - Every

Wednesday, 7-8 pm *and* First Friday of the Month, 8 until 9am

**SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM** – Baptism is celebrated at various times, often 11a Mass, the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month. Baptisms are also scheduled privately upon arrangement with families. Parents must contact the Religious Ed Office to arrange Baptismal Prep sessions and learn all the details.

**SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION** - Saturday, 3:30-4:20p, Sundays 8:00-8:20; 10:30-10:50 am, Wednesdays 7:00-8:00p and by appointment

**SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING OF THE SICK** – Those who are dangerously ill or facing serious surgery may receive this healing Sacrament. Please contact Father John Maria to make arrangements.

**SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY** – Congratulations! Couples must contact Father John at least six months in advance of desired date. Marriage Preparation is required for proper celebration of a valid and Sacramental marriage.

**PROSPECTIVE GODPARENTS/SPONSORS** asked to serve as Baptismal Godparents or Confirmation sponsor must request an eligibility certificate from the parish priest. To serve in this special role parishioners must: Be in full communion with the Catholic Church; Attend Mass weekly; have received Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation & Confirmation; Married individuals need be validly married in the Catholic Church. Please contact the Parish Office and allow 2 weeks to process.

**HOMEBOUND** – Parishioners homebound and unable to attend Mass please contact the Parish Office to arrange visitation, to receive Holy Communion

**HOSPITALIZED** - Call the Rectory to notify of someone in the hospital so we can pray for and possibly visit them. Each hospital in our Diocesan boundaries is either covered by a local parish or has a priest on call at the hospital.

**PARISH MEMBERSHIP** - Welcome to St. Mary's Parish! Please contact the Parish Office to meet with Father John and become registered. We also ask those who move to notify the parish

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION** – Education for parish children occurs September 10 through April. Contact Religious Education office: 610-683-6454 for registration.

### **Center-based**

- Levels 1 to 5 meet every week, Sundays, 9:40-10:50am
- Level 6-8 meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays, 6-8pm
- Youth Group (9-12) Stay tuned for upcoming events.

**Home-based** Arrangements may be made for select grade levels, contact Ann Pergosky

6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, FEBRUARY 11, 2024

*We are a welcoming community called to deepen and share our faith*

# MASS Intentions

Mon	02-12	7:30a	Andrew Romansky, Jr.
Tue	02-13	7:30a	Gregorio Pilandas
Wed	02-14	7:30a	Valetta Rohrbach Smith
		12:00p	John C. Zimmerman
		7:00p	People of the Parish
Thu	02-15	7:30a	Venceslaus Fernando
Fri	02-16	7:30a	Gertrude Silva
Sat	02-17	8:00a	Stas Smith
		4:30p	Anthony Muratore
Sun	02-18	8:30a	Robert Spezialetti
		11:00a	People of the Parish

To sponsor Blessed Sacrament Candle or altar flowers contact the parish office

## READINGS and CELEBRATIONS for the WEEK

Sun	02-11	6 <sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary: Lv 13:1-2, 44-46; 1 Co 10:31—11:1; Mk 1:40-45
Mon	02-12	Jas 1:1-11; Mk 8:11-13
Tue	02-13	Jas 1:12-18; Mk 8:14-21
Wed	02-14	Ash Wednesday- Jl 2:12-18; 2 Co 5:20—6:2; Mt 6:1-6, 16-18
Thu	02-15	Dt 30:15-20; Lk 9:22-25
Fri	02-16	Is 58:1-9a; Mt 9:14-15
Sat	02-17	Is 58:9b-14; Lk 5:27-32
Sun	02-18	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent - Gn 9:8-15; 1 Pt 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15

## MUSIC MINISTRY

	THIS WEEK	NEXT WEEK
4:30p	Skoronski, Nathan Moore, Mark	Spanier, Amelia Casey, Peggy
8:30a	Spanier, Chris Moore, Mark	Moore, Mark Cebenko, Steve
11:00a	Sitarik, Anne Moore, Mark	DeWald, Heather Talarico, Tim

## Collections Info

	OLG	In Church	Expenses
Regular Collection	\$4,274.00	\$6,937.00	\$20,171.20
Building Fund	\$10.00	\$1,000.00	
Capital Campaign	\$40.00	\$225.00	
Parish Partnership		\$50.00	
Lifeline/Mary's Shelter	\$90.00	\$1,532.00	
Other Regular Income	\$40.00	\$385.00	

## HOW DO I SIGN UP FOR ONLINE GIVING?

1. Visit our church website at [www.stmaryskutztown.com](http://www.stmaryskutztown.com)
2. Click on the Online Giving link
3. Complete the online registration form. It's that simple! For more info or help setting up your account please contact the parish office: 610-683-7443



Please pray for the sick of our parish.....  
..... and those that care for them



Logan Alkons	Ken Gorski	Diana Novi
Evie Barletta	Bijou Greenwood	Joanne O'Connell
Caleb Bauer	Muriel Hadnagy	Benedicta Otchere
Christopher Bennett	Devon Hanna	Rick Padilla
Claudia Berg	Jacqueline Hartz	Ed Pilarski
Greg Bradford	Linda Haurus	Pat Regensburger
Monica Bradford	Hannah Hayduk	Rosemarie Reimert
Bradford family	Kathy Henry	Bill Pettit
David Byer	Lillian Karch	Megan Roth
Nadia Cahill	Michael Karch	Nina Hertzog
Drew Cengeri	Joanne Kear	Rundle
Meaghan Clark	Patricia Keeney	Richard Rusconi
Colleen Wolff	Jane Kern	Sr. Mary Sapanara, MSC
Jerome Costanzo	Milton Kern	Tina Scatamacchia
Kim Costanzo	Joan Kiwak	Jim Sherman
Nancy Devlin-Litinsky	Carol Korbe	Barbara Shidisky
Dave Ebling	John Korbe	Tracy Snyder
Trent Eidle	Cena Knowles	Nicole Sosik
Patricia Farabaugh	Henry Kryeski	Todd Tanis
Paula Fehlinger	Edward & Rosemary Law	Ralph Touch
Joey Flecher	Harry Lewellen	Amy Turko
Tammy G.	Julie Lindsey	Christine VanDoorn
Joe Galantino	Eva Malanczuk	Phillip Vazquez
Michelle Galantino	Dennis Martinsen	Joseph Wawrzak
Sandra George	Barry, Sharon Miller	Bonnie Wessner
Lucy Ginsiorsky	Elaine O. Miller	Emily Wickle
	Nikolette Nolte	

Contact office to update list: [secretary@stmaryskutztown.com](mailto:secretary@stmaryskutztown.com)

## Please Pray for all those serving our nation

Keenan Albright	Anthony DiPietro	Nick Marakovits
Kyle Albright	Charles Douglass	Melissa Marks
Michael Barron	Joseph Douglass	Laura Miller
Andrew Barthol	Keith Essig	Spencer Morris
Frank M. Bieda	Ryan Flanagan	Heather O'Donnell
John Boyer	Kale Follweiler	Menaka Nayyar & Anthony Pirnot
Matthew Boyer	Michael Allen Haak	Jake Schmeck
Jonathan Cardé	Diane Henry	Phillip Talarico
Ryan Cengeri	Cmdr. Jason Hoch	Steve Ziegler
Eric Cunningham	Joshua Joseph	
Timothy DeVall	Dan King	
	James Knight	

Contact office to update list: [secretary@stmaryskutztown.com](mailto:secretary@stmaryskutztown.com)

We are a welcoming community called to deepen and share our faith

**EVENTS THIS WEEK**

- Sun 02.11 6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**WORLD MARRIAGE DAY**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Collection – Capital Improvements**  
**SOUPERBOWL OF CARING-after Masses**  
**Pick up Photo Directory-after Masses**  
**Elementary Religious Education, 9:40a**  
**Men of St. Mary’s meeting, 10a**  
*No evening Religious Ed. classes this week*
- Tue 02.13 Faith Sharing, 10a**  
**Baptism Workshop, 6:30p**
- Wed 02.14 ASH WEDNESDAY**  
**Mass times: 7:30a, 12n and 7p**
- Thu 02.15 Music Ministry, 7p**
- Fri 02.16 Mary’s Café, 7p**  
*Lenten Friday- abstinence*
- Sat 02.17 Lenten Saturday daily Masses, 8a**  
**Pray the Rosary, 4p**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Collection – Catholic Home Missions**

**EVENTS NEXT WEEK**

- Sun 02.18 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Collection – Catholic Home Missions**  
**Youth Mass, 8:30a**  
**Level 6 Retreat, 9a-1p**
- Mon 02.19 Parish Office Closed: Presidents’ Day**
- Tue 02.20 Faith Sharing, 10a**
- Wed 02.21 Daily Mass, 7:30a and 6p**  
**Stations of the Cross, 6:30p**  
**Adoration and Reconciliation, 7-8p**
- Thu 02.22 Music Ministry, 7p**  
**R.C.I.A., 7p**
- Fri 02.23 Lenten Friday- abstinence**
- Sat 02.24 Lenten Saturday daily Mass, 8a**  
**Pray the Rosary, 4p**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Collection – Parish Partnership**

**BULLETIN DEADLINE:** Submit items by 12n one week prior to Sunday. *Submit full-page items two full weeks in advance.*

**PARISH MEMBERSHIP:** Welcome! Please register for parish membership. Call 610-683-7443 for an appointment and find out about all the parish has to offer! *Inform us if moving.*

**BAPTISM WORKSHOP** 6:30p Feb. 6/13. Ann: 610-683-6454

Watch/visit WFMZ TV Stormcenter for parish cancellation notices due to winter weather.



**A Word About...Catholic Home Missions**

**Next week**, we will take up the Catholic Home Missions Appeal. Today, nearly 40 % of dioceses in the United States and its territories are unable to fund the essential pastoral work their communities need. Your support of this appeal helps them meet these faith formation and sacramental needs. Please prayerfully consider how you can support this appeal. Learn more: [www.usccb.org/home-missions](http://www.usccb.org/home-missions).

**KU NEWMAN CENTER MASSES** Special Mass Time of **1p February 11 (Super Bowl Sunday)**. Ash Wednesday Mass at 5p. Sunday Masses return to 5p thereafter.

**PARISH-WIDE SURVEY COMING SOON!** As part of an exciting new initiative in the Diocese of Allentown, St. Mary’s will participate in a parish survey about discipleship conducted by the Catholic Leadership Institute! It is called the Disciple Maker Index Survey. **We need your help!**

Please help and participate in a 10-15 minute survey online, accessed through a link from Feb. 14—March 31, 2024. Reflect on your own spiritual growth and provide feedback on our parish’s efforts to help you grow. All responses are confidential, and the parish will only receive information about the community as whole.

Find the link on the parish website after Ash Wednesday and in next week's bulletin. We strive for the highest response rate possible.

This information will be invaluable to Fr. John Maria and our various ministries as we plan for the future and strive to be the best disciples we can be. We will receive the results this spring/summer at which time we will share what we have learned with the entire parish.

If you prefer a paper copy you may pick one up after daily and Sunday Masses in the gathering area of the church. Please return completed paper surveys in the Gathering Area bin near the blank surveys. To make special arrangements for a paper copy, please contact the parish office at 610-683-7443 or [secretary@stmaryskutztown.com](mailto:secretary@stmaryskutztown.com) *And please update your contact info:*

<https://forms.gle/iFwTC4vt3CDrof4x9> Thank you for helping with this important project!



**REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS** Stas Smith of our parish. Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. *Amen*

**SCRIPTURE REFLECTION- DEACON NIKOLAI ROMERO**

*Thelo, katharisthati, “I will it, be made clean.”*

These are the words of Jesus to the leprous man who kneels before him to beg for healing. From that Greek word, we get the English word catharsis. When I hear this Gospel reading, I put myself in the place of the leper. Catharsis seems like the perfect word to describe the utter relief and freedom Jesus has granted him.

As we hear in the first reading, skin diseases were a major stigma in the ancient world. Being diagnosed with leprosy practically meant exile. Though our medical understanding has developed today, leper colonies are not so far in the past; Molokai, Hawaii probably being the most well-known. So, the leper who approaches Jesus in the Gospel is asking for more than to feel better from a cold or the flu. He is begging Jesus to restore him to a full life, to free him from exile and shame.

Most of us today probably do not have to worry about leprosy or exile. Yet, we all know suffering in some way. We all know the pain of separation which can be caused by sin. Many of us know the feeling of shame in some way. The good news is this: Jesus desires to make us clean, to restore us to life. Our role is to approach Christ in humility and then, like the leper made clean, to draw others to Him.

In 1990, SOUPER BOWL OF CARING began with a simple prayer from a single youth group:

**“Lord, even as we enjoy the Super Bowl game, help us be mindful of those without a bowl of soup to eat.”**

Share in God’s love for your neighbors in need and give generously on SOUPER BOWL SUNDAY. All donations collected will go directly to our Tackle Hunger Charity of Choice: the **GREATER BERKS FOOD BANK**. Learn more: [TackleHunger.org](http://TackleHunger.org)

## **OUR LENTEN OBLIGATION**

***Ash Wednesday: February 14***

- **Church law** considers every Friday and the season of Lent as penitential days and times. The practice of penance is a part of our faith and Christian life. When we do penance, we imitate Jesus, who Himself recommended it as necessary to His followers, and gave them the example of His prayer and fasting.
- **The Lenten obligation**, as determined for Catholics in the United States by our bishops, requires that fasting be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The law of abstinence is to be observed on Ash Wednesday and all the Fridays of Lent.
- **Who must fast?** All Catholics who are between the ages of 18 and 59. The obligation ceases when one begins his/her 60<sup>th</sup> year on his/her 59<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- **Who must abstain?** All Catholics who are 14 years and older.
- **What does fasting mean?** The observance of fasting means that those obliged may take only one full meal on the day of fast. Two lighter meals (not equal to another full meal) may be taken to maintain strength according to one’s needs.
- **What does abstinence mean?** The law of abstinence forbids the eating of meat, including poultry. Voluntary abstinence refers to refraining from lawful pleasures in a spirit of penance.
- **Can anyone be dispensed or excused** from fast and/or abstinence? Individuals for a just cause may be dispensed by their pastor or by a priest with the faculty to do so. In our Diocese all priests may dispense individuals who are committed to their pastoral care. Those who are ill or have a similar serious reason are excused from the observance of fast and abstinence. Catholics are reminded that they should not lightly excuse themselves from this obligation.
- **Are there other obligations** that we should fulfill? Catholics are obliged to fulfill what has been called their “Easter Duty.” They are required to receive Holy Communion during the Easter time. In the United States this obligation can be fulfilled from the First Sunday of Lent until Trinity Sunday (February 18 until May 26, 2024). Those conscious of serious sin are reminded of the obligation to confess their sins at least once a year during this time.
- **Catholics also are encouraged** to make Lent a time of more intense prayer and to practice almsgiving and other works of charity. Parishes are encouraged to continue participation in Operation Rice Bowl.

**COOKS WITH COLLARS IS ON!** Fr. John needs your help!

Fr. John represents St Mary’s in this online cooking competition to raise funds for parishes and Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Allentown. Visit [www.CooksWithCollars.com](http://www.CooksWithCollars.com) to see (and vote for) your favorite diocesan priests’ delicious kitchen creations. **Vote (by Feb. 12)** for our top chef! All proceeds benefit the parish you vote for.



**MARY’S CAFÉ:** Friday, Feb. 16 at 7p in the Religious Ed Center, all are invited to join Father John at MARY’S CAFE.

Our topic will be “The Sacrament of Reconciliation”. This sacrament of God’s mercy is an incredible gift of grace, and yet if we’re honest, most Catholics would admit mixed feelings. Even the most devout Catholics feel as though they’re not doing it right! We’ll address many questions including: Didn’t confession get swept away by Vatican II (*spoiler alert; No*) What if you don’t like the priest? (*Ouch*) Why must we go to confession? Whose ideas was it to go to a priest? How can we best prepare to confess for success?

On this First Friday of Lent, (*meatless*) pizza and drinks will be available. And feel free to **bring a simple meatless dish to share for a Lenten Potluck!** *No desserts, please.*

Join this informal and informative talk, Q&A and fellowship with your family at St. Mary’s. Hope to see you then. Or catch the Morning Edition of this talk 10a, Feb. 22



Dear Families,

This Lent, through CRS Rice Bowl, we will encounter communities in Uganda, El Salvador and Indonesia and learn how issues like hunger and climate change are impacting our sisters and brothers around the world. Together, we’ll reflect on our participation in the body of Christ and how the Eucharist—the Bread of Life—compels us to share bread for life with all our human family.

With Catholic communities across the United States, our Lenten alms will make a difference in the lives of millions of people. Together we can support people building a better future for themselves and their communities.

CRS Rice Bowl provides resources for daily reflection throughout the liturgical season. Consider these suggestions in your family’s Lenten plan:

- Use your CRS Rice Bowl and Lenten Calendar each day to guide your prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
- Visit [crsricebowl.org](http://crsricebowl.org) to read weekly Stories of Hope and watch the accompanying videos.
- On Lenten Fridays eat in solidarity with our global family. Simple, meatless recipes: [crsricebowl.org/recipe](http://crsricebowl.org/recipe) CRS Rice Bowls will be collected at the end of Lent, so stay tuned to learn more. Thank you for participating in CRS Rice Bowl with your family.

Sincerely,  
St. Mary’s Parish

**PARISH DIRECTORY UPDATE: Directories available in Gathering area Feb. 10 & 11** or contact the parish office to pick up your copy! Digital copies available upon request. Freewill donations are welcome to defray expenses. We look forward to a full version in the coming years!

**ST MONICA MINISTRY HOLY HOUR:** 6-7p Feb. 13. Are you heartbroken because family members have left the Church? Join the St. Monica Ministry petitioning Our Lord to draw our loved ones who've strayed back into the fold. Meet monthly at St. Theresa Church, Hellertown. Info: Celest [StMonicaMinistry27@gmail.com](mailto:StMonicaMinistry27@gmail.com)

**CATHOLIC GRANDPARENTS ASSOC MTG:** 9:15a, Feb. 17, St. Joseph the Worker, Parish Center. Lenten prayers, repentance and almsgiving is a good time for grandparents to Pass On The Faith. Join the next meeting of the Catholic Grandparents and share and learn Lent traditions.

**MONDAY MINI RETREAT:** Feb. 19 at St. Francis Retreat House, Easton (and virtual). AN OVERVIEW OF SYNOD TOPICS AND PARTICIPANTS. 6p meal; 7-9p talk. Register: [stfrancisretreathouse.org](http://stfrancisretreathouse.org) (select retreats/mini-retreats) or 610-258-3053 ext.0. Onsite offering \$35 (**deadline 4p Feb. 9**); virtual offering \$20 (**deadline 4p Feb. 14**).

**DIOCESAN LENTEN RETREAT SERIES-The Mystery of the Eucharist** with diocesan speakers. Weekly schedule: 6:30-7:30p Adoration, 7:30p presentation, 8p refreshments.

- o **Feb 19** - Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Roseto, Topic "Healing" by Maggie Riggins
- o **Feb 26** - St. Ambrose, Schuylkill Haven, Topic "Presence" by Lillian Fallon
- o **March 4** - St. Catharine of Siena, Reading, Topic "Sacrifice" by Rob Johnson
- o **March 11** - Ss. Peter and Paul, Lehighton, Topic "Meal" by Kristin Osenbach
- o **March 18** - Cathedral of St. Catharine of Siena, Allentown, Topic "Holy" by Fr. John Trigilio

**Sign up:** [allentowndiocese.flocknote.com/signup/152184](http://allentowndiocese.flocknote.com/signup/152184)

**MEN'S LENTEN MORNING RETREAT:** 9a, March 02, St. Jane de Chantal Church, 4049 Hartley Av Easton. The Allentown Diocese's Men's Commission invites the men in the Diocese to attend their Lenten morning retreat. This year, the theme is "Brothers In Prayer" featuring Bishop Alfred Schlert, Fr. Alex Brown, and Fr. Keith Laskowski. The morning will include Mass, talks, and confession. Register at: [www.MenAliveInChrist.org/events](http://www.MenAliveInChrist.org/events)

**RETROUVAILLE:** Rediscover the Love in your Marriage. Thousands of couples have healed their marriages at Retrouvaille (*retru-vee*). Get help for marriage problems, difficulties or crises. Learn to build communication skills and increase intimacy. **Next program: Feb. 16-18 weekend** at the Family Life Center in Malvern. Info or Register: 215-766-3944 or 800-470-2230. *All inquiries strictly confidential.* [www.HelpOurMarriage.org](http://www.HelpOurMarriage.org)

**EXPLORE \*NEW\* DIOCESAN EMPLOYMENT NEEDS**  
Visit: [www.allentowndiocese.org/about/employment](http://www.allentowndiocese.org/about/employment)

**DAILY SUBSTITUTES K-8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE:** Work with Holy Guardian Angels Regional School family. Submit cover letter, resume, and all certifications and clearances. Email: [kelpre@hgaschool.org](mailto:kelpre@hgaschool.org)

**Word of Life:** "Married love differs from any other love in the world. By its nature, the love of husband and wife is so complete, so ordered to a lifetime of communion with God and each other, that it is open to creating a new human being they will love and care for together." ~ USCCB, Married Love and the Gift of Life

**REFLECTION... by Rev. Leonard N. Peterson**  
I wouldn't expect any of you to recognize the name of Joseph Carey Merrick. He was a victim of a very rare disease called different names at various times. It is characterized by a severe and ugly distortion of the body, particularly of the skull and upper torso. The disease was nicknamed "elephantiasis" because often enough that was what many victims resembled. In fact, a 1980 movie about Merrick's sad life was entitled "The Elephant Man." (Google "The Elephant Man" or "Joseph Merrick" to learn more.)

Projecting back to the time when Jesus walked, there was a nearly equal disfigurement brought on by leprosy. The great fear then was that by just being near a leper would transmit the infection. Remember those similar Covid 19 restrictions? Thus, in the Old Testament Book of Leviticus read today we hear of a whole section of laws regarding what to do as a healthy person and what the victims themselves had to do.

All of this provides meditation material for us about sin—all sin but especially the mortal kind—seen by many spiritual writers as "leprosy of the soul." Serious sin disfigures our souls, making us repulsive to God and angels alike. Just because we can't literally see this effect in us doesn't make it unreal. Often a sinner will feel very nervous and uncomfortable in the presence of a genuinely good person, place, or thing. The only person happy about us when we fall is the devil. Please don't write Satan off as an outdated figure locked up in the Bible. Or as a little red gnome with a pitchfork. He is a real fallen angel, superior to us in intellect and cunning. A genuine hater of God. Jesus spoke of him multiple times.

How coincidental that this gospel appears on this 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, designated by Pope St. John Paul II as "World Day of the Sick." Yes, it is meant for us to pray and help all who are ill. By extension, also of all people sick with sin or spiritual leprosy.

Today we are only 3 days out from Ash Wednesday and the great penitential season of Lent. Let that fact sink into your consciousness as we prepare for it. As for sin, I found a long list of contrasts between how we look at sin and how God does, written anonymously. Here is just a pertinent part:

"Man calls it an accident; God calls it an abomination.  
Man calls it a blunder; God calls it blindness.  
Man calls it a defect; God calls it a disease.  
Man calls it a luxury; God calls it leprosy."  
God love you and give you His peace.



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Mailing Address  
POST OFFICE BOX F  
ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA  
18105-1538

4029 WEST TILGHMAN STREET  
ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA 18104  
(610) 437-0755  
Fax (610) 433-7822

14 February 2024

*Ash Wednesday*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we journey through the sacred seasons of our faith, none is more rigorous than the Holy Season of Lent. During this time, the Church urges us to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

In my Lenten Letter this year, I would like to reflect with you on the practice of **fasting**. Already by the second century, fasting was integrated into the lifestyle of Christians. Fasting is not merely an ancient ritual but a timeless discipline that deepens our spiritual relationship with God.

In this act of self-denial, we emulate Christ's sacrifice and cultivate virtues such as humility and temperance. Fasting redirects our focus from worldly desires to the eternal truths of our faith, fostering a spirit of prayer, holiness, and charity.

In the New Testament, Jesus fasts forty days and nights in the desert, modeling for us the forty-day period of Lent. When Jesus' disciples were disappointed because they could not cast out a certain evil spirit, He told them that "only prayer and fasting can cast this kind out, nothing else can." (Mark 9:29).

Because the very life and teaching of Our Lord exemplify the practice of fasting, we can conclude that a spirit of denial is integral to the life of a Christian and the overcoming of the Evil One. Saint Athanasius wrote, "Devils take great delight in fullness and drunkenness, and bodily comfort. Fasting possesses great power and it works glorious things. To fast is to banquet with angels."

When we fast, we deny ourselves legitimate things so that we can master our cravings instead of being driven by them. The spiritual purpose of fasting should not be linked to the desire — which can be commendable for health reasons — to lose weight. Spiritually, fasting is linked to a desire for penance which in turn focuses our attention more clearly on prayer and the overcoming of sin.

Fasting is also a path of solidarity with the less fortunate, which leads to the Lenten practice of almsgiving/good works. It is a reminder of the hunger for justice in our world, especially in our time of disrespect for human life, of growing marginalization between people, and of multi-national conflicts. Let us, then, courageously approach the discipline of fasting with sincerity, seeking spiritual renewal and a closer union with the suffering Christ.

During this Lenten season, may we embrace fasting not as a burden, but as a transformative spiritual journey. By willingly surrendering certain comforts, we can open our hearts to God's grace and allow His love to fill the void left by material indulgence.

May God's grace guide us through this Holy Season of fasting, leading us to a richer, more profound experience of His love and mercy as we "banquet with Angels" in preparation for a joyous Easter.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

✠ Most Reverend Alfred A. Schlert

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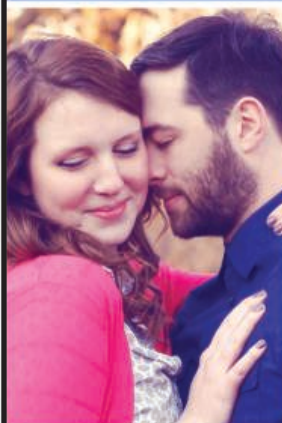
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