



St. Thomas Church: established July 1, 1285 by King Vaclav II



YEAR OF FAITH:
OCT. 11, 2012-NOV. 24, 2013
"The 'door of faith' (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church."---Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* for the Indiction of the Year of Faith.

February 16th and 17th 2013

The First Sunday of Lent - C

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St. Thomas Church

The Reflection of the Gospel

Deserts can be fearful places. An inhospitable climate, a variety of local serpents, spiders, lizards, flies, or disease bearing mosquitoes and loneliness, all pose threats to survival. Yet, deserted areas can be as fascinating today as they were to ancient peoples who thought them to be the habitat both of good and malevolent, animal guised spirits. "Only beasts and gods can live alone in deserts," ran an old adage. Writing around AD 70 Mark, to convey his theological concerns would, of course, use language and imagery drawn from popular legend and oral history. We read that Jesus, according to Mark's phrase "was driven by the Spirit" into the desert. This meant that his mission was totally inaugurated not through personal or human whim but by the direct –almost descriptively coercive-action of the Holy Spirit. Once in the desert, here a synonym for the domain of Satan (in Hebrew this means "adversary"), Jesus experienced first hand the full force of diabolical temptation. Was it hunger, the desire for power or even a reckless presumption of God's protection? Matthew's gospel seems to indicate all three factors were in active collusion. Yet, as God willed, Jesus was to be abandoned neither now nor in future confrontations with those relentless adversaries of his public ministry to Israel. "For the angels came to minister to him" was Mark's assurance that Jesus, "the Holy One of God", had passed through his first "trial or temptation" with divine assistance. He was ready to begin.

All of us are now standing on the edge of our own "lenten deserts." It is almost a daunting journey to arrive at Easter glory. The temptations to "to let things be" is very attractive. Why do penance? Is not life penitential in its peculiar demands and disappointments? Why be spiritually "masochistic"? That is not the point. What Mark tells us in this gospel passage or pericope is that we have to shed the encumbrances that weigh us down on our journey. Traditionally, the Church has proposed three practices for the lenten season.

The first, **prayer**, or conversation with God, makes us sensitive to the presence of God and His will for us.

The reading of Sacred Scripture can be of enormous help as we take these first steps of enlightenment. The second, **almsgiving**, is really giving thanks for the abundance God has given us. Scripture says that a generous person will be heard on the day of distress. The third practice is **fasting**. To forgo some foods and drink is recommended by all the great teachers in the Church. So, with the example of Jesus, himself, and the teaching of our brothers and sisters who have gone before us, let us walk through our "desert of forty days" with courage. "If God is with us, what can anyone do to harm us?"

LENT

Lent is the season before Easter, in the West lasting liturgically from Ash Wednesday until the Mass of Holy Thursday exclusive (see General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar). The evening of Holy Thursday begins the *The Easter Triduum*, which lasts from Holy Thursday to the Evening Prayer of Easter Day. However, Lenten fasting and penance continue until the end of Holy Week, and all of Holy Week is included in the traditional 40 day Lenten fast, despite Lent ending *liturgically* on Holy Thursday. We should note that in many Protestant churches, the liturgical season of Lent continues through Holy Saturday, although in current Catholic discipline, Lent ends liturgically before Holy Thursday. While Sundays are typically excluded from the Lenten fasting and abstinence restrictions, and are not numbered in the traditional "40 Days" of Lent, they are still part of the Lenten season, as can be seen from their Lenten themes. Thus, the way Lent is observed in the Catholic Church can be a bit tricky, because the actual modern liturgical season of Lent (lasting 44 days, including Sundays) is numbered slightly differently than the traditional 40 day Lenten fast, which excludes Sundays. The purpose of Lent is to be a season of fasting, self-denial, Christian growth, penitence, conversion, and simplicity. Lent, which comes from the Teutonic (Germanic) word for springtime, can be viewed as a spiritual spring cleaning: a time for taking spiritual inventory and then cleaning out those things which hinder our corporate and personal relationships with Jesus Christ and our service to him. Thus it is fitting that the season of Lent begin with a symbol of repentance: placing ashes mixed with oil on one's head or forehead. However, we must remember that our Lenten disciplines are supposed to ultimately transform our entire person: body, soul, and spirit. Our Lenten disciplines are supposed to help us become more like Christ. Eastern Christians call this process *theosis*, which St. Athanasius aptly describes as "becoming by grace what God is by nature."

Ongoing Activities

*If you would like to receive a copy of the bulletin by email, please contact osaprag@augustiniani.cz

*We are looking for a **professional English teacher** to teach English to children from 3 till 7 years old. Please contact Fr. Juan if you are interested

*Please, pray for the **Mission** in our Parish!

*St Thomas' English Speaking Community now has a presence on **facebook**. Please 'like' our page and if you want to get more involved with the community, join our group!

*Fr. William will be in USA for the next month. Fr. Juan will be taking care of the community: 602684538

*If you are interested in studying the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies, a course run by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, please see the website <http://brs-ccrs.org.uk> and contact Jim Willetts on jimwill@email.cz

***DIVE CLUB "BARRACUDA"** Dive club "barracuda", associated to the parish, offers dive courses (system CMAS) and the possibility to dive. If you are interested, please contact Ramón 774 717 049 o Antonio 608 22 76 86

*During **Lent season** every Friday at 6pm in the church will be the Stations of the Cross.

MESSAGE OF POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR LENT 2013

"Believing in charity calls forth charity" "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us" (1 Jn 4:16)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The celebration of Lent, in the context of the Year of Faith, offers us a valuable opportunity to meditate on the relationship between faith and charity: between believing in God – the God of Jesus Christ – and love, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and which guides us on the path of devotion to God and others.

1. Faith as a response to the love of God

In my first Encyclical, I offered some thoughts on the close relationship between the theological virtues of faith and charity. Setting out from Saint John's fundamental assertion: "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us" (1 Jn 4:16), I observed that "being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction ... Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere 'command'; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1). Faith is this personal adherence – which involves all our faculties – to the revelation of God's gratuitous and "passionate" love for us, fully revealed in Jesus Christ. The encounter with God who is Love engages not only the heart but also the intellect: "Acknowledgement of the living God is one path towards love, and the 'yes' of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never 'finished' and complete" (*ibid.*, 17). Hence, for all Christians, and especially for "charity workers", there is a need for faith, for "that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbour will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love" (*ibid.*, 31a). Christians are people who have been conquered by Christ's love and accordingly, under the influence of that love – "*Caritas Christi urget nos*" (2 Cor 5:14) – they are profoundly open to loving their neighbour in concrete ways (cf. *ibid.*, 33). This attitude arises primarily from the consciousness of being loved, forgiven, and even served by the Lord, who bends down to wash the feet of the Apostles and offers himself on the Cross to draw humanity into God's love.

"Faith tells us that God has given his Son for our sakes and gives us the victorious certainty that it is really true: God is love! ... Faith, which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love. Love is the light – and in the end, the only light – that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working" (*ibid.*, 39). All this helps us to understand that the principal distinguishing mark of Christians is precisely "love grounded in and shaped by faith" (*ibid.*, 7).

Mission 2013

This weeks reading in support of the Holy Father's call for a year of faith, is unique, in that the man who called for this mission will soon step down as the leader of ur faith. Pope Benedict XVI announcing he will step down from his service to the church. Our Holy Father will resign his post on the 28th of February.

The last Pope to voluntarily resign his function was Pope Gregory XII, who was Pope from 1406 – 1415. During the years 1378 to 1417, the Church experienced what is known in history as the Great Schism. This was a political fight to control the church and in essence, was a fight to determine who was the rightful Pope. This was a battle between Avignon France and Rome. The details are not important for today's discussion but the crisis experienced then presented a serious threat to the very foundation of our church.

Pope Gregory XII resigned in order to force a new election of a Pope that would include all voting members of the Cardinal Counsel and reunite the Church. He was only the fifth Pope to resign and his resignation rescued the Holy Catholic Church from one of the greatest crisis in its 2000 plus year history.

Today we do not battle to challenge where the true Holy Father sits, or even who he is. His seat is in Rome; in the basilica which marks the spot on which St Peter was martyred; where he refused to be executed in the same manner as Christ, and was crucified upside down.

The question is "do we believe the media that the church is in crisis?" Certainly we can admit that we have PR problems. When someone you know comments about the Catholic Church, they typically use an arsenal of weapons from our history such as: The Crusades, The Spanish Inquisition, selling of indulgences, or the modern day sexual scandals. How the media has portrayed Pope Benedict and the church is certainly something we should address in our lives and our relationship with the church.

The media gives an inordinate amount of time to the negative, to critics of the church and those who would tell us we are wrong for believing what we believe. They condemn the church in saying the Pope is conservative, that we cannot change, and then tell us that what we need is a Pope of color and that will show the world we are in touch. Papal politics and who will be the next Pope is far beyond the scope of our small parish. We who are brought together, in what for most is a foreign land, to come together and worship in the liturgy and tradition of those before us. We come together with faith and in faith. We are the modern day descendants of the Second Temple Jewish Sect; later the Christ followers of the Jewish faith; we are the Believers of Christ; the Disciples of God; we are Christian and we are Catholic.

Our Pope, by his resignation has challenged us to examine who we believe; the media or our Holy Father?

We offer some alternate thoughts to the media today for consideration: The medical condition of our Holy Father is such that he feels he cannot carry the duties of his position. For those of us who do not put every action of the church into a Dan Brown novel, this is a revolution that shows the strength of character of our current Pope.

The duties, the travel, the requirements of the position are demanding, if one is unable to physically handle the stress, the decision to step down is one of courage, one of character and one of hope. If this were a decision by a world leader, or by a senior CEO, the media would be applauding the strength of character and good decision-making. I argue that we should be doing the same right now.

The faith that our Holy Father asked us to renew through mission; is the foundation of our Church. Where are the media when we feed the hungry? When we help to cloth the poor? When we provide education to those who do not have the opportunity or means to educate themselves?

Maybe we don't face the challenges today that were faced by Gregory XII, but with a new Pope comes change. With change comes friction. Let's renew our personal faith and pray for our College of Cardinals to elect a Pope that will share our faith and guide our church, know in our hearts that our Christian Acts of Faith and we as members of the church are more important than media commentaries. We in the family know best, not those outside it.