**HCCSM Speech**

**March 2009**

 For me, the arrival of Lent each year creates questions. Should I go to Mass every day? Will this year first successful attempt to give up ice cream in 25 years of trying? What exactly are the rules about fast and abstinence?

 This process become more acute in these confusing and troubling times. As the future becomes less clear, I find myself pressing harder than ever for the answer to the question, “What can I do during this Lenten season to draw closer to God?”

Luckily, in the 58th chapter of Isaiah, the prophet relates to us a message from the Lord describing a form of fasting pleasing to God:

The fast I choose is to loose the bonds of wickedness…to let the oppressed go free…to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the homeless poor into your house…to clothe the naked…

This beautiful message confirms God’s call to use our actions to demonstrate His love for the world. Perhaps this Lenten season we can follow Isaiah’s message of preparation…of fasting…to deny ourselves by reaching out to help others.

Our Parish Community Service Ministry is here to help you along this path…Our goal is to provide you, the Holy Cross family, with opportunities to meet God’s call to service. We do this by sponsoring a variety of service opportunities for both our full-time and our seasonal parishioners.

You can assist poor children select new footwear as part of the Education Foundation’s Sneaker Exchange program.

We can help you become a mentor in our local schools through the Big Brothers and Sister’s programs: our parishioners help disadvantaged children learn to read.

By hosting social activities at St. Francis Manor, a retirement community providing affordable housing to elderly members of our community, we provide you the chance to bring an occasional evening of joy into the lives of many.

We assist in providing volunteer drivers to the Meals on Wheels program sponsored by the Senior Resource Association.

And, we provide ongong support to our Catholic community of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Fellsmere through blanket and food drives.

Our activities have a wonderful patron in Father Murphy who has supported the Community Service Ministry throughout its ten-year existence. I’m pleased to tell you that Fr. Murphy’s contributions have been recognized by our community at large. He will be honored by the Gifford Youth Activity Center on July 16th for his exemplary efforts. I hope you can join me there to confirm your support of our wonderful pastor.

From time to time, we also ask for your financial support for our activities. And, when we ask, you always respond with a generosity that is known throughout our Diocese. Thankfully, in these crazy and scary economic times, today is not one of those days.

Instead, I’d like to give you a brief update on how your incredible generosity in support of Our Lady of Guadalupe is changing the landscape of the Catholic Community in Fellsmere. Last year’s fundraising campaign has doubled the size of the mission church and brought new facilities for social programming to the people of OLG. Funds still remain for the construction of additional facilities and for the endowed support of programs to help those in need. Through your generosity, members of the OLG community are fighting addictions, learning to speak English, working with computers and becoming citizens of the United States.

This year we are bringing forth a very special Lenten service opportunity. On Saturday, April 4th, we will be sponsoring a Habitat for Humanity work day. Everyone here can get involved. If you know how to swing a hammer or if you can make egg salad to feed hungry workers, or, frankly, if you are like me and you don’t know a nut from a bolt but are willing to learn…we can use your help during this special morning.

If you are interested in our Lenten Day of Service, or in any of the other activities I have mentioned, please call Pat Kroger at the Parish Office who coordinates our volunteer recruitment and placement.

So, what exactly will ***this*** Lent mean to us? When God told Isaiah of how to fast through service, he also promised us great rewards. God promises us that when we help others:

**Your light shall break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up speedily**

**Your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of God shall be your rear guard.**

**Then you shall call and the Lord will answer.**

**You shall cry and He will say, “Here I am.”**

Helping others brings God’s comfort to our souls…especially in troubling times…and that may be what Lent, especially this Lent, is all about. Thank you.