

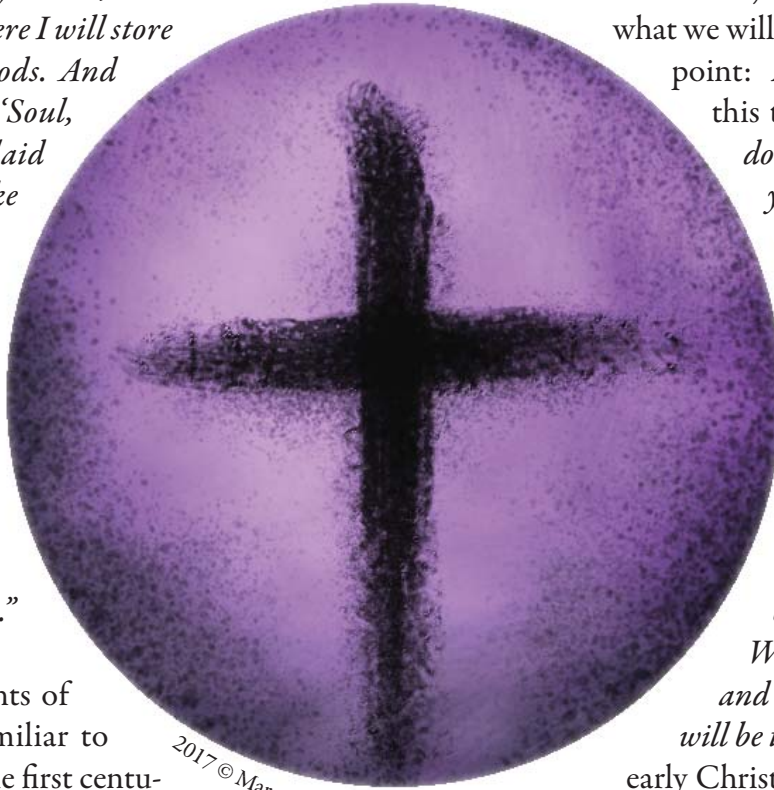
GREAT LENT:

Time to Divest in the World and Invest in Eternity.

“I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him. ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”
(Luke 12:18-21)

Do the above sentiments of this rich man sound familiar to us? You might call this the first century’s version of the American dream. Consider the time and energy spent on such things as investment portfolios, the Stock Market, the Commodities Exchange, just to mention a few, and ask yourself the question: Do I give as much attention to my Eternal Portfolio? Am I as busy “*Storing up treasure in heaven*” as I am accumulating material things which won’t do me a bit of good in eternity?

Perhaps most unnoticed by many of us is how this endless quest for material success kills the spiritual and Christian life. The season of Great Lent reminds us first of all that our stay on earth is a very short one. Great Lent always begins with the imposition of ashes (Ash Monday for the Maronites and Ash Wednesday



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for the Latin Rite) and the ashes remind us of what we will come to be at some future point: Ashes. St Ephrem states this truthfully, “*No advantages do you offer those who love you, O world, you dwelling-place of sorrows. All who draw near to you do you seduce with your treasures and with all your delights, but in the day of death both the fair countenance of the beautiful and the might of the strong will be cast down into the grave. Woe to him who loves you and is loved by you, for his joy will be transformed into cries.*” The early Christians understood this well. Here is how they lived which transformed

an empire.

Together with their doctrinal immobilism (they didn’t believe that doctrine “evolved”), another mark of the early Christians was **their resistance to the moral ethos of their time**. Christian commitment was a matter, not merely of faith, but of conduct. Every candidate for baptism declared his renunciation of the world, his repudiation, that is, of contemporary paganism and its self-pleasing standards. They conformed to the teachings of Jesus, which in pungent phrases **made stricter** the already strict Jewish teaching in sexual matters. As to other practices such as sodomy and infanticide – the ancient world’s substitute for abortion – it was

not even imagined that Christians could contemplate such abominations. Brought up in these doctrines, **the Christians failed to move a step to meet the world halfway** (no common-ground initiative here), so that in the fullness of time **they found the world moving to them**. So it's been done before. We can start with Great Lent to acquire the aforementioned.

To help we will borrow from the Apostolic Exhortation of Bishop Thomas Olmstead of Phoenix, Arizona: *Into the Breach*. Every man reading this newsletter should read this exhortation – the laymen for inspiration to live like those early Christians and the clergy to inspire them towards that. (It's obtainable on the Internet: <http://intothebreach.org/into-the-breach/>). While the bishop's words are addressed to adult men, all can profit from this wisdom and what better place to begin than with Lent. So Bishop Olmstead exhorts us to:

1. **Pray every day.** Each Catholic man must start his day with prayer. It is said, *“Until you realize that prayer is the most important thing in life, you will never have time for prayer.”* Without prayer, a man is like a soldier who lacks food, water, and ammunition. Set aside some time to speak with God first thing each morning. Pray the three prayers essential to the Catholic faith: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be. Pray also at every meal. Before food or drink touches your lips, make the Sign of the Cross, say the “Bless us, O Lord” prayer, and end with the Sign of the Cross. Do this no matter where you are, with whom or how much you are eating. Never be shy or ashamed about praying over meals. Never deny Christ the gratitude that is due to Him. Praying as a Catholic man before every meal is a simple but powerful way to keep strong and fill the breach.

2. **Examine your conscience before going to sleep.** Take a few moments to review the day, including both your blessings and sins. Give God thanks for blessings

and ask forgiveness for sins. Say an Act of Contrition.

3. **Go to Mass.** Despite the fact that attending weekly Mass is a Precept of the Church, only about one in three Catholic men attend Sunday Mass. For large numbers of Catholic men, their neglect to attend Mass is a grave sin, a sin that puts them in mortal danger.

The Mass is a refuge in the Spiritual Battle, where Catholic men meet their King, hear His commands, and become strengthened with the Bread of Life. Every Mass is a miracle where Jesus Christ is fully present, a miracle that is the high point not only of the week, but of our entire lives on Earth. In the Mass, a man gives

“Every Mass is a miracle where Jesus Christ is fully present, a miracle that is the high point ... of our entire lives on Earth.”

thanks to God for his many blessings and hears Christ send him again into the world to build the Kingdom of God. Fathers who lead their children to Mass are helping in a very real way to ensure their eternal salvation.

4. **Read the Bible.** As St. Jerome so clearly tells us, *“Ignorance of the Sacred Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”* When we read God's word, Jesus is present. Married men, read with your wife and your children. If a man's children see him read the Scriptures, they are more likely to remain in the Faith. My brothers in Christ, this I can assure you: Men who read the Bible

grow in grace, wisdom, and peace.

5. **Keep the Sabbath.** From the creation of Adam and Eve, God the Father established a weekly cycle ending with the Sabbath. He gave us the Sabbath to ensure that one day out of seven we will give thanks to God, rest, and be refreshed. In the Ten Commandments, God asserts anew the importance of keeping the Sabbath.

With today's constant barrage of buying and selling and the cacophony of noisy media, the Sabbath is God's respite from the storm. As Catholic men, you must begin, or deepen, keeping the holiness of the Sabbath. If you are married, you must lead your wife and children to do the same. Dedicate the day to rest and true recreation, and avoid work that is not necessary. Spend time with family, attend Mass, and enjoy the gift of the day.

6. Go to Confession. At the very start of Christ's public ministry, Jesus calls on all men to repent. Without repentance from sin, there can be no healing or forgiveness, and there will be no Heaven. Large numbers of Catholic men are in grave mortal danger, particularly given the epidemic levels of pornography consumption and the sin of masturbation. My brothers, get to Confession now! Our Lord Jesus Christ is a merciful King who will forgive those who humbly confess their sins. He will not forgive those who refuse. Open your soul to the gift of our Lord's mercy!

7. Build fraternity with other Catholic men. Catholic friendship among men has a dramatic impact on

their faith lives. Men who have bonds of brotherhood with other Catholic men pray more, go to Mass and Confession more frequently, read the Scriptures more often, and are more active in the Faith. I call on each of our priests and deacons to draw men together in their parishes and to begin to rebuild a vibrant and transforming Catholic fraternity. I call on laymen to form small fellowship groups for mutual support and growth in the faith.

There is no friendship like having a friend in Christ.

