

Star of the Sea

STELLA MARIS PARISH NEWSLETTER

The Spirituality of Fasting



Father Rob Reflects...

This month's newsletter invites us to reconsider fasting. Fasting is not about depriving ourselves of food but about opening our hearts to God's transformative grace. It teaches us **Forgiveness, Acceptance, Self-control, Truth, Integrity, Nourishment, and Grace** - essential sustenance for the soul. Through fasting, we cultivate the inner freedom necessary to receive God's merciful love more fully.

In today's consumer-driven world, fasting may seem like an archaic practice from a bygone era. But it is not! Fasting is, in fact, a necessary spiritual discipline, one that Jesus Himself embraced.

While in Medjugorje last year, I read *Fasting with the Heart* by Fr. Slavko Barbaric, who offered insights that deeply resonated with me. He emphasized that through fasting and prayer, the healthy develop greater compassion for the sick; the young and strong are safeguarded from the many distractions and addictions of our modern world; the wealthy grow in awareness of their blessings and become less inclined to self-indulgence; the sinner is led to sincerity in repentance and a deeper experience of God's mercy; and the holy grow in faith, hope, and love, placing even greater trust in God's providence.

Fasting is a powerful spiritual weapon and a path to deeper communion with God. I hope this newsletter gets you thinking and reading about fasting. Through it may you learn to cast aside all that distracts your spirit, instead growing in love of God and neighbor.

In Christ,

Fr. Rob Elford

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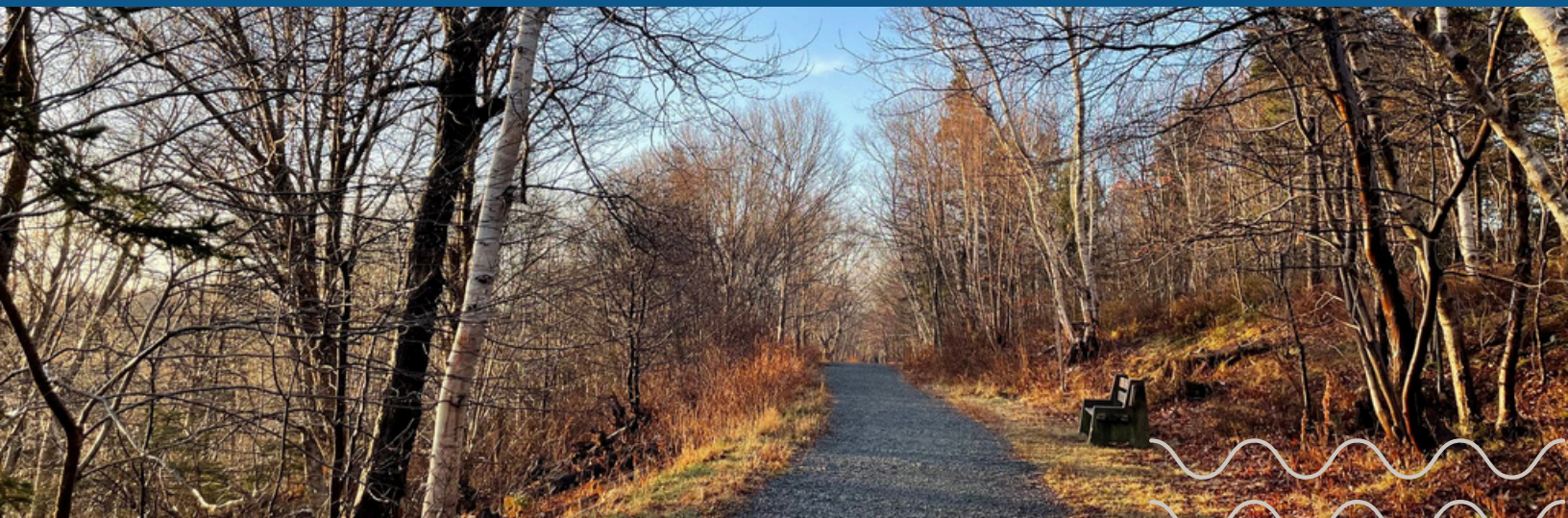
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Mass Times

Saturday Mass: 4pm
Sunday Mass: 8am/10am/4pm
Tuesday/Thursday: 7pm
Wednesday/Friday: 9am
First Saturday: 9am





Our Deepest Longing

Written by Margaret Raymond

The spiritual practice of fasting has long been emphasized in Scripture and upheld by the Church. As Catholics, we are invited to observe obligatory days of fasting and abstinence, provided we are in good health. Yet fasting is often misunderstood.

Why do we fast? Fasting strengthens our will, helps us overcome sin, unites us with the poor, and amplifies our prayers. But beyond these, fasting reveals the deepest longings of our hearts. We all have desires for connection, stability, and love. Yet even when we obtain what we seek, a deeper hunger remains. Perhaps this longing is meant to direct us to our ultimate fulfillment—Jesus.

This desire for God is woven throughout Scripture. The Psalms capture it beautifully:

"As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?" (Psalm 42: 1-2)

There have been moments when I have felt this yearning deeply, especially in times of heartache. Suffering often makes it easier to cry out to God, to recognize our need for Him. But what about in the ordinary moments? Do we still long for Him then? The truth is yes. Even when we don't feel it, our hearts are always in need of Him.

Fasting reminds us that if we ache so intensely for food (or whatever we abstain from), how much greater must our soul's cry be for God! Every hunger pang, every craving, can become a reminder of our dependence on Him, a whisper of the deeper longing for Jesus within us, even when we are unaware of it.

Here is the greatest truth: as we long for Him, He longs for us even more. From the cross, Jesus spoke the words "I thirst." Of course, He felt physical thirst, but His words reveal an even greater yearning, a thirst for our souls, for closeness with His bride, the Church.

As we enter into Lent, I pray we remember that the Lord does not seek to punish us in this time of fasting. May we remember that holiness is not measured in the length or intensity of our fast. As we fast together as a Church this season, may we come to realize our great need for the Lord and his greater love for us.

WANT MORE TO READ?

Join us in reading Bishop Robert Barron's *Lenten Gospel Reflections*, starting on Ash Wednesday. To register and join an email group, go to the Parish website: www.stellamarishalifax.com (there is no cost). Copies are available in the foyer and at the office!

Lives Transformed: Sherry's Story

The first time I fasted was during Lent in my mid-twenties. At that stage of my faith journey, having recently reverted to Catholicism, I approached fasting primarily as a discipline rather than a deeply spiritual practice. That changed when I learned about the apparitions in Medjugorje and Our Holy Mother's request for the faithful to fast on bread and water on Wednesdays and Fridays. Something about this call resonated deeply within me, and I began to fast with greater intention and prayerfulness.

For years, I longed to make a pilgrimage to Medjugorje. In 2023, after moving back home to Halifax, this desire was finally fulfilled. Once there, I experienced an intense deepening of faith and a stirring in my heart to embrace fasting more consistently and purposefully.

Fasting has become a powerful journey of prayer and self-denial, teaching me to say no to myself so I can say a deeper yes to Christ. Though difficult at first, it has grown into a source of strength and joy. Now, fasting is not just something I do—it is a way of life, a practice that draws me closer to God, and a reminder that my true treasure is in heaven.



Stepping Out

AN INVITATION FOR YOU:

STELLA MARIS PARISH LENTEN MISSION

"A Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving" - Led by Fr. Francesco Pirisi

DATES & TIMES:

- **March 25th & 26th:** Presentation at 7pm, followed by Eucharistic Adoration and Confessions.
- **March 27th:** Mass at 7pm, followed by a social in the hall.

During Lent, we are asked to come back to ourselves and our faith as preparation for the celebration of Easter. How do we do that? And what is the significance of all the good "Lent things" that we do?

This Parish Mission will be an opportunity to reflect on "Sacrifice" – to deepen our understanding of it and its value for our faith lives beyond this time of the year. There is so much grace that is present and active within all of us personally and in our community. We want to grow in awareness of it, and to know the ways that we are making it a "Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving."

During the mission, we will focus on special parts of the Liturgy to better understand what happens during Mass and the amazing mystery of our participation in the Sacrifice of Christ Himself. There is so much beauty in who we are as a Church and what we do as Catholics, and it is too precious not to know it.

The Bulletin

EVENTIDE: Returning in April 2025

There will be no Eventide in March because of the Parish Lenten Mission on March 25th. Eventide will return on April 29th, at 7pm.

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HALIFAX-YARMOUTH:

The Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth is excited to announce the availability of scholarships for students actively engaged in their parish community. These scholarships aim to support students who demonstrate a strong commitment to Church renewal, leadership, and academic excellence. To apply, students must complete the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth Scholarship Application Form on the Archdiocese website, www.halifaxyarmouth.org. Applications will be reviewed in the spring.

UNBOUND: Begins April 7th, 6:30-8:30pm.

Would you like to go deeper in the abundant life that Jesus has promised? 'Unbound: Freedom in Christ' takes you on a reflective journey over 8 weeks into the heart of the Gospel message. It guides you to apply the Gospel in day-to-day life to find deeper identity and freedom in Christ. Unbound starts April 7th 2025 - Monday evenings 6:30-8:30. Books and workbooks are \$24 each. To register email sherryflemming@gmail.com or call 902-423-3114. Register by March 20th 2025 to ensure material arrives before start date.

What Unbound participants say...

"God used my journey through Unbound to heal me and equip me for service. Thank you for being instruments of His Grace. I received prayer and the Father's Blessing at the end and it changed my life." - Phyllis Nortey

"The Unbound program was an answered prayer that taught me how to cooperate more fully with Jesus and how to surrender more deeply to Him. The prayer at the end provided a fresh indwelling of His love." - Sherry Flemming

PLEASE SUBMIT BULLETIN ITEMS FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE BY MARCH 24TH, 2025

PARISH RESOURCES

Funeral Information and Bookings: funerals@stellamarishalifax.com

Immigrant Support Committee: newcomers@stellamarishalifax.com

Community Outreach: outreach@stellamarishalifax.com

Home Communion: homecommunion@stellamarishalifax.com

Responsible Ministry: office@stellamarishalifax.com

St. Vincent de Paul: 902-479-0630

Giving: e-transfer to the Parish at: giving@stellamarishalifax.com

MEET THE TEAM!

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Text "hi" to +1 (833) 230-3288 and add us to your contacts!