

# INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART

“The observance of Lent is the very badge of Christian warfare. By it we prove ourselves not to be enemies of Christ. By it we avert the scourges of divine justice. By it we gain strength against the princes of darkness, for it shields us with heavenly help. Should men grow remiss in their observance of Lent, it would be a detriment to God’s glory, a disgrace to the Catholic religion, and a danger to Christian souls. Neither can it be doubted that such negligence would become the source of misery to the world, of public calamity, and of private woe.” – Pope Benedict XIV, Encyclical Letter *Non ambigimus*, 1741.

February 24, 2020  
Shrove Monday

Dear Members and Friends of the Society of the Sacred Heart,

Greetings to you from an exceptionally mild winter in Wausau. Here we have the great joy and blessing of keeping the Devotion of the Forty Hours before beginning our Lenten pilgrimage, with Solemn Masses and Eucharistic Processions, and adoration day and night. We are especially blessed this year to be joined in this devout exercise by the first American foundation of the Sister Adorers of the Royal Heart. It is their daily acts of adoration before the Heart of our High Priest in the Most Blessed Sacrament which obtain from Almighty God the graces so urgently needed by the earthly dispensers of His mysteries for the salvation of souls.

Over the centuries, the Forty Hours have often been kept on the days preceding Ash Wednesday as a solemn act of reparation for the scandalous sins committed by Christians during Carnival. *Carnevale* means “farewell to flesh”; it was a time when people of the Christian world engaged in food, drink and merriment before Lent, the great forty-day period of penance whose observances were often enshrined in civil law. Shrovetide is an old English name for the time starting on Septuagesima Sunday during which the faithful were especially urged to be shriven (confessed and absolved) before Lent began.

Today we cannot say that any worldly celebrations occurring before Lent are markedly different from what goes on afterward. If we do keep the Forty Hours during Shrovetide, it is rather in reparation for the neglect of the forty days that follow. It is, in fact, a supreme act of love toward Our Savior, where we tell Him that His is the only banquet to which we desire an invitation.

After all, why did the Church so exhort her children in former times to make a good confession before Lent? Let us consider this point for a moment. We all know that it is a commandment of the Church to receive Holy Communion once during Eastertide. Those who are in grave sin must go to confession around this time if they are to make what has been known for centuries as their Easter duty. It was not always this way. The law of Easter communion dates from the early Middle Ages. To employ the language of the liturgy, it was imposed *refrigiscente mundo* – at a time when the world was growing cold in charity. The Easter duty was instituted as the bare minimum for remaining in communion with Holy Mother Church, as hardened sinners might otherwise content themselves with staying away from the Sacraments forever. Christians of the first ages would scarcely have believed that a time would come when the faithful would have to be compelled on pain of sin to

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receive the Blessed Eucharist. If we do nothing more than confess once a year and make our Easter duty, we are obedient to the Church's commandment, but we are as yet far from the devout life.

Shrovetide or Septuagesima, though it can claim a millennium of history, is not nearly as old as the ancient liturgies of Lent. It has been added to our venerable church calendar as a beautiful preparation for this holy season, a reminder of what we should be doing during Lent. We should make a good confession now, because we are about to receive our penance. Our Mother the Church invites us to a time of quiet joy. We are far from the glorious Easter banquet, nor have we arrived at Calvary. During Lent we find ourselves at the feet of our Master in His public ministry. Here we find Him – tempted in the desert, transfigured on Tabor; teaching in the Temple, preaching from the Mount. Here we find those who should become our familiar friends – sinners like us who became great saints: impetuous Peter, cautious Nicodemus; the Prodigal Son, the pure loving Magdalene; Our Lord's gentle rebuke of the woman at the well, His tender compassion toward the woman taken in adultery. And in the background, yet always watching us, is that sinless *Blessed One who bore and nursed* our Master, who *heard the word of God and kept it* in her Immaculate Heart (Third Sunday of Lent). It is she whom we implore every time we make the Way of the Cross to grant us some share in the affections of her pierced Heart on Calvary.

As we make our forty day journey, Our Lord wishes to nourish us, lest we faint on the way. Before our Easter communion, let us imitate our forefathers: let us attend daily Mass and make many fervent Lenten communions. This is the reason for our fasting, the goal of our prayers, and the reward of our almsgiving.

I wish you all a very blessed season of Lent. If we must have sorrow for sin, let us have no worries for the future, for we are in the company of *Him who loved us* (Rom. 8:37).

Sincerely Yours in His Most Sacred Heart,

Canon Aaron B. Huberfeld  
National Chaplain