



Deacon Deliberations by Deacon Gary Kupsak

“You’re Invited to the Rice Bowl”

I must admit that I have not, and do not know too many people who are Jewish. Having said that, a very important lesson I learned about Lent came from a Jewish roommate of mine when we were in Infantry Officer’s Candidate School at Ft. Benning Georgia. Barry Lacter, now Rabbi Barry Lacter of New York, New York was my roommate for the middle four weeks of the 12-week program. One evening during mandatory study hall, Barry asked for forgiveness for any wrongs he may have done me. This was part of his preparation for Yom Kippur, a high holy day for the Jewish people and a day of atonement for sins against God and his people.

Barry’s act of contrition reminds me that Lent, our spiritual journey from death to life, is communal in nature. We cannot make good with God without making good with neighbors; our offenses against them are offenses against God. Jesus has repeatedly taught us through the Gospels, including the Lord’s Prayer, that forgiveness from God calls for recognition of our own sinfulness **“forgives us OUR trespasses.”** In the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass, we confess not only to almighty God, but “to you my brothers and sisters.” Genuine repentance opens our heart to the wrong we do to others, and the self-righteousness with which we justify our wrongdoing.

Catholic Relief Services’ annual Lenten program, CRS Rice Bowl (crsricebowl.org), facilitates prayer, fasting, and almsgiving by bringing God and neighbor into our daily Lenten offering. Pope Francis writes in his Lenten message, “In imitation of our master, we Christians are called to confront the poverty of our brothers and sisters, to touch it, to make it our own and to take practical steps to alleviate it.” Each week through videos and different media resources, CRS showcases one country (for example, Guatemala) struggling with a specific challenge (child labor) to bring a person, a family, or a community along with their struggles and hopes into our homes.

Please consider participating in the CRS Rice Bowl program during Lent this year. Contribution boxes are available in the narthex. Spend some reflective time to check out the aforementioned CRS website. We should remember the words of Pope Francis, “Lent is a fitting time for self-denial; we would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others with our own poverty. Let’s not forget that real poverty hurts; no self-denial is real without this dimension of penance. I distrust charity that costs nothing and does not hurt.” This Lent, I invite you to “Be in the Rice Bowl,” not to play football, but to help in developing the Kingdom of God, and be well on the way to a positive and fruitful season of prayer, fasting, almsgiving and seeking the forgiveness for the wrong we have done to others.

“Forgive us our trespasses and we forgive those who trespass against us.”