

When more of the same is not more of the same

EDITORIAL

The 2010 Idaho Catholic Appeal is at hand and parishes are beginning to display posters and distribute flyers along this year's theme "Called to Serve, Called to Share."

In his letter to Catholics, Bishop Michael P. Driscoll thanked all who gave to the 2009 ICA. Because of those donations, the diocese was able to do the following:

- Educate and support 13 seminarians, 16 deacon candidates and 11 lay ministers in training;

- Provide medical and retirement care for aging and seriously ill priests;

- Help Catholic Charities of Idaho provide services for families, senior citizens, refugees and the poor;

- Guide college students as they grow in their faith at campus ministry centers;

- Bring the Gospel message to

thousands incarcerated in state prisons.

This barely begins to scratch the surface of how the ICA impacts the life of the church in Idaho. More of the same needs to be done, and to try to accomplish that goal, the bishop is asking for more help.

He's not asking necessarily for more money, although with the economy starting to rebuild, there may be some whose resources will allow a more generous gift this year. Instead, he's asking more people to give and urging those who already give to encourage others who have not given previously. Less than 30 percent of all registered Catholics give each year, and while this pattern is not unique to Idaho, it is the area where better results are vital.

By seeking more donors, we share in our mission to be stewards of the gifts God has given us. By reaching out to our neighbors, we offer them a seat at the table. We offer them the opportunity to deepen their faith



and share their stories. Perhaps they have lost their jobs and were too embarrassed to ask for help; so, we help them. Perhaps they don't have the money to give to the Appeal, but could offer time and talent to their community and were reluctant because they thought their gifts had no value; so, we invite them.

There are many for whom stewardship focuses singularly on treasure, but stewardship is

so much more than that. Talking to our neighbors about the Idaho Catholic Appeal is the means to stewardship, not the end. Opening our ears and our hearts to our neighbors' stories provides a doorway to a richer community measured not by donations or dollars, but by hospitality, welcome and the message of God's love.

More of the same isn't merely more money, donors or pledges. This year, more of the same means more giving, more listening and more joy to spread because the message Catholics offer is one of more hope, and there can never be too much of that.

We urge you to give to the Idaho Catholic Appeal and to encourage those around you to join in giving. Even more strongly, we urge you to reach out to strangers, to hear their stories and to welcome them as Jesus would.

Sowing the seeds of a glorious Easter

In the seminary, we used to help the Benedictine monks celebrate Rogation days. On Rogation days, we would process into the monastery gardens, singing psalms and begging God for rain. I was always struck by the irony. Asking for rain during spring in western Oregon is like praying for sand in the summer in the Sahara.

However, a providential God surely knew how to allocate the fruit of our prayers. Somebody needed the rain somewhere.

Rogation days always occurred during Lent, and Lent is the church's Springtime. When we keep a good Lent, the spiritual rain is falling and God's seeds within us are sprouting and putting down roots.

If you cross out all the Sundays, Lent lasts 40 days. This is an ancient and honorable number. The children of Israel wandered in the desert for 40 days, and there they learned how to be God's faithful people. Jesus was in the desert for 40 days, wrestling with Satan. After his resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples.

So, the number 40 signals a time for testing, a time to be with God and a time to deepen our lives as his sons and daughters.

Jesus spent his 40 days fasting, and that is what the church asks us to do. Discipline requires on Ash Wednesday and Fridays during Lent to partake in only one full meal and to abstain from meat. Other sacrifices are also possible and the nature of those

In the Midst of God's Abundance

By Father William Taylor



depends on each person. Give up some favorite food or snack ... eat two small meals that don't add up to the day's largest meal ... stop watching television ... spend less time on the Internet. You decide.

Then there's the importance of almsgiving. The poor are God's saving bank, and money given to the poor bears good interest. With the suffering in Haiti serving as a background, there are special reasons to give alms this year. Send money to Catholic Relief Services or Catholic Charities of Idaho. Make a pledge to the Idaho Catholic Appeal. Fill up an Operation Rice Bowl box with coins. Contribute to St. Vincent de Paul. Give money and groceries to your local food bank.

In my old days as a pastor, I used to hand out a pamphlet featuring 40 days of prayer and meditation. This practice requires discipline. People have to mark time on their schedule – time to read the pamphlet and put their hearts in a place of prayer. Given faithfully in prayer, spiritual lives flourish.

When you drive to work, turn off the radio and say part of the rosary or listen to Christian music. Or, simply drive in silence, aware of the presence of God. Attend Mass before heading for work. Make a visit in a church on your way home.

Children need to learn how to keep Lent. Some parishes hand out pamphlets designed specially for families with children. Make an effort to pray before meals, to offer prayers before going to bed and to review the Sunday sermon with children after Mass.

In a few days, we will mark our foreheads with ashes. Many proudly wear those ashes when they are at work or on the street, a sign of our resolve to live our faith well during these 40 days.

How wonderful it would be for Idaho to be filled with Catholics who turn Lent into a time for growth and new life. If we do this, it will be a glorious Easter.

Father Taylor is the author of two books on Mormonism and has penned several award-winning pieces for the ICR over the years.

The lesson of Haiti in a season of hope

By Congregation de Notre Dame Sister Patricia McCarthy

We need Lent this year more than ever. The abject misery of Haiti overwhelms our psyches. Of course, we respond initially with aid and, for some, with presence. We offer to adopt the orphaned children, to care for the sick, to contribute toward shelter and housing and to distribute food. All of these responses are appropriate for any who are able. Catholics call these actions the works of mercy. Lent is the time when we are summoned to fast, pray and give alms; in other words, to do the works of mercy for the love of God and in the presence of God.

Lent is far more than that and the agony of Haiti is far beyond our ability to touch only by kindness and generosity. The level of suffering, seen

simultaneously in the face of a single child and in the aerial view of a country in ruins, calls for the courage to embrace the suffering itself with the hope to find meaning in the chaos – perhaps, even to find hope. For that, we need Lent.

At halftime of the Super Bowl this year, millions of people watched the musical group, The Who, and listened as they sang the lyrics over and over; "Who are you?" As the words flashed all around the band in a light show, the tens of thousand of fans in the arena sang along: "Who are you?" "Who are you?" All of our faith lives are a journey into asking Jesus Christ that question. "Who are you?" Lent is the time when we dare to look at Jesus in his own abject misery, in his agony, betrayal, torture and execution by crucifixion. We ask the same question:

"Who are you?"

Underneath what we are asking Jesus is the deep question of the meaning of suffering. Whether it affects hundreds of thousands such as in Haiti or a single person, suffering can bring us to our knees in helplessness or to our feet in rage. We cannot understand why a child has to die from cancer, why another child turns to violence, why an already poverty-stricken country endures such massive destruction, why addictions ravage a family or why terrorism and war are so prevalent. The list goes on and on. Some of these sufferings are caused by the actions of others; some are not. Some could have been averted; some could not. Suffering surrounds us; so we turn to face the suffering Christ and ask: "Who are you?" "Where are you when we are suffering?"

The answer won't come in words. There will never be meaning to explain or alleviate suffering. This Lent hold a crucifix and look and look and look. There is no reason why Jesus Christ suffered except that some people hated him and his message. He chose to come among us as one of us and he refused to hate in return. He endured suffering with love; he did not understand it himself. The answer to suffering is not an answer at all; it is a person, Jesus Christ. No matter the misery, Christ is present to those suffering it. We cannot comprehend 200,000 dead, but Jesus Christ knows the name and the number of hairs on the head of each one. When sorrow or loss seem to push us into depths which we think are beyond return, Christ is present. In our pain, in our despair, in our own way of the

cross, there is the presence of Christ, holding, sustaining and bearing the weight of the cross with us and for us.

We need Lent to face ourselves and our limitations, to gain strength when we are least capable of it, to be with Christ as he suffers today in his body on earth. If Jesus' story ended at Calvary, suffering would have the final word. We know better. By the awesome power of God, there is resurrection. We do not have to feel hope to live hope. We know by Jesus' rising from the dead that no suffering is greater than the power of God to redeem it in grace and to ultimately heal it in hope. The people of Haiti sang their prayers in the midst of their fear. That is the inexplicable Christian way.

This year, we need to spend Lent with the suffering Christ to learn how to sing our hope.