

Week 6 – Ordinary Time – February 14, 2010

I try to exercise every day. I don't; I miss some days. But on average I'll ride a stationary bike or do weight training three or four days a week. If I miss many days, I pay for it – I pull a muscle. If I exercise regularly I can miss a little and it won't hurt. The same applies to diets. Eat right every day, then occasionally eat something else, and it shouldn't hurt. Jeremiah applies this to the spiritual life in today's first reading. He compares two plants that do not change with the seasons. One is a barren bush in the desert getting no water and too much sun; it stays barren all year. The other is a tree beside a stream of water; its leaves stay green all year even when the heat comes – even when a drought comes, it still bears fruit because its roots can drink. Jeremiah says if you put your trust in human beings, you are going to be like the barren bush; but if you trust in the Lord, you will be like the green-leafed tree.

Lent begins this Wednesday, time for us to think seriously about where we are planted – in the desert or at the stream. When you come to mass, you plant yourself at the eucharist, the best stream God has to offer. You hear the word of God and taste the presence of Christ in communion. But each of us can probably do a better job of staying close to the life-giving stream of God's presence every day. We need to take an honest look at where we are.

This weekend I'm giving you a copy of my booklet *What Am I Doing for Lent This Year?* Please pick one up now and look it over with me. I have a new version of this for teenagers; you can pick one up in the gathering space after mass. If you want to make changes, you have to die to something, so that something else can live. If you are planted at the wrong place, this book is about stretching roots in a new direction, or perhaps uprooting yourself completely from the kind of life you were living and setting down roots someplace new.

From pages 3 to 7 you see a series of blank boxes. Please take some time at home before Ash Wednesday to think about these areas of your life: your health, relationships, parish, society, work, finances, education, environment, and your overall happiness. Give yourself a score in each box and see what stands out. Is there some area of your life that needs work right now? There are several more boxes starting on page 11, each dedicated to prayer, fasting and almsgiving. If you want to get the most out of Lent, work on all three areas. Do something to enhance your prayer – come to mass or pray at home; fast from something – something extra you can sacrifice or some behavior you really should stop; and give alms in some way – contribute your time, your talent or your treasure. Then over on pages 20 and 21, write down your resolutions for how you will spend the next 6 weeks.

There are additional helps in the back of the book: a calendar on pages 22-23 to note your activities each day; a list of Sunday's gospels with room to write your reflections; and tips on celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. After spending Lent reflecting on your faults, you will be ready to confess them and receive God's support to stay planted in the right place. I will

guarantee you if you keep Lent seriously this year, you will experience God at work in your life in a very personal and helpful way. You will plant yourself by life-giving streams.