

BULLETIN – MARCH 15

Lenten Penance services. We shall let you know the opportunities for your Lenten confession(s) as they are made known to us. As of right now, you can figure on these:

Sun., March 15, 11 a.m.	SS. Peter & Paul
Thurs., March 19, 2 p.m.	West Catholic H.S.
Sun., March 22, 3 p.m.	O.L. Consolation, Rockford
Wed., March 25, 6:30 p.m.	Holy Family, Caledonia
Thurs., March 26, 9 am-3 pm	St. Andrew's Cathedral (CCHS)

A number of priests will be on hand at each of these services to help with confessions. The sacrament of penance holds a central place for us in our work of Lenten penance. Please don't neglect this marvelous source of forgiveness and help.

Lenten Q & A: How long can the Church continue to say some things are wrong when so many people do them? "I'm thinking specifically about astrology and birth control," said the fellow diner. "These things are very popular. No wonder churches are emptying out. People are voting with their feet. Why doesn't the Church get that?"

Father Isidore Mikulski replied to this in a column long ago in the following fashion. We build on his thoughtful remarks: In the catalog of sins, there aren't many that don't have a popular following. The number of devotees has nothing to do with objective morality. There's no such thing as a smart sin, but in my estimation, astrology is near the top of the list for dumb ones. Most who dabble in it do so out of idle curiosity. However, if a person sincerely puts faith in astrology and horoscopes, it becomes the sin of idolatry. The guilt could be mitigated in that the individual is obviously not too bright, and we pray that God in his mercy will take that lack of mental competence into account.

That's just "A," for astrology. How about the "B," for birth control? Or Calumny, Detraction, Egocentrism, Fornication, Gluttony, Heresy, etc., etc. We can't go into all of them here. Suffice it to say that we don't commit sin because it looks *bad*. We commit sin because we convince ourselves that it's *good*, at least for us, at least temporarily, no matter what the commandments of God or the long history of moral teaching of Christ and his Church might have to say about it. To say that something must be all right because 90% of people do it might sound very democratic. There sure are a few sins I'd vote off the list if I could, because they're the ones I have to keep telling when I go to confession. But truth is truth. If you don't believe Christ and the Scriptures and the Church about *some* things, what are you going to pick and choose next? Our baptism means taking the plunge with Christ, not standing at a buffet line to select only the items that you find agreeable.

Did you know? McDonald's Filet-O-Fish sandwich was first made by franchisee Lou Groen in Cincinnati in 1963 to appeal to the predominantly Catholic community in which his restaurant was located. Fifty-two years later and who-knows-how-many-million sold?

In his wisdom, St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), bishop and doctor of the Church, says that each of us sinners is like a bride who, fascinated by the beauty and glitter of her wedding ring, falls in love with it and forgets the one from whom it came. There's so much truth in that simple simile. We become fascinated with God's creatures, we fall in love with those he gives us as relatives and friends. Yet, if we are not careful to always have Him uppermost in our minds, we can easily become enmeshed and enveloped by the very creation which should always be for us a manifestation of His goodness and omnipotence. And is that not really at the root of all sin? Our first parents, at the mere suggestion of the evil one, turn their attention from the God whom they have known intimately to a mere creature, a tree. The tree holds out a promise, but its only promise is something which they already possess: "You will become like gods!" (Genesis 3:5). But they are already sharing God's own divine life! They are already enjoying daily communion with him in the earthly garden of paradise which they are privileged to tend as stewards of the Almighty. God has held absolutely nothing back from them, contrary to the tempter's lie. Yet they allow themselves to attempt to seize what they have already been given, what they already possess, and to have it *on their terms*. Their terms include the knowledge of good and bad, rather than Life (the *other* tree in the middle of the garden). If you forsake Life, you choose death; and God's warning to them is fulfilled in that choice: "The moment you eat of it, you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

Like all of God's commandments, that one is not an arbitrary, don't-cross-that-line-because-I-say-so dictate. It's more like the voluntary disregard or violation of something forbidden by the owner's manual. The automaker doesn't pepper the manual with warnings simply in order to make you suffer. The cautions are not intended to hem you in and spoil your fun with useless facts. The manual contains such things SO THAT you may continue to get the maximum enjoyment and use from your automobile for an indefinite time. Our human nature--and now even more, our *fallen* human nature--is very susceptible to satanic suggestion. The evil one knows better than to tempt us with anything that appears repulsive. So the bad, the death-dealing, is twisted and dangled before us to look good. Sin holds a fascination for us like cow snot holds a fascination for 11-year-old boys. While others may stand around in shock and disbelief, and mom and sisters may recoil and shriek, for many a growing boy the motto seems to be, "The grosser the better." The *good* and the enjoyment, no doubt, lie *precisely* in the momentary attention he gets from the disgust and revulsion expressed by everyone else. And so it is with sin. As long as our primary attention is fixed on the creature and what we get out of it (turning it into an object) rather than on the Creator and what we can offer him (becoming subjects, as he created us to be), we plunge deeper and deeper into sin's trackless wasteland. Lent is intended to help us find our way out, back to Life and Love itself, in the person of the One who created us "little less than a god" (Psalm 8:5). It's not too late to change course. Remember who gave you that ring. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: *Love* sets your heart on fire, and the smoke gets in your eyes. *Passion* sets your pants on fire, and the smoke gets in your eyes. *Conscience* is the fire department that helps you figure out the source of the smoke.