



# LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS

A Column by Fr. Tom

## It all begins with Prayer

As you read this column, we are beginning our first full week of Lent. On Ash Wednesday, you probably heard about the three main practices of Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. But perhaps, you're like many a good Catholic, and focused only on the fasting part. [What are you giving up for Lent?] Well, I'd like to take the opportunity throughout Lent to meditate on each of the three main practices of Lent, why they're each important for our spiritual life and how we might use them together to grow closer to the Lord and one another.

I'd like to begin our Lenten reflections with some words about prayer. In my last column, I mentioned that "Lent is the season where we discover how we can love even more than we do today." In order to make that discovery, we need to spend some time reflecting on where we are now. We might ask ourselves, "How much love do I have right now? How do I love God? How do I demonstrate love for others? Is there some way that I might be more loving?"

Prayer is one way that we can show more love – for God and for others. How does that work? Well, let's first look at the ways that prayer shows love for God. Our relationship to God is, first of all, just that – a relationship. The glue that holds any relationship together is communication. Prayer is the way that we

communicate with God. Prayer is our opportunity to talk – and also to listen – to God. Our prayer should be a two-way communication. God doesn't want social media posts; he wants real, honest communication. First of all, that means that when we talk to God, we don't just share the good news with Him. Instead, we tell Him everything – the good, the bad, the happy, and the sad.

Next, real, honest, two-way communication means that we have to listen to God too. Let me put it this way: if you wanted to learn more about football and had the opportunity to sit down with one of the great coaches, would you spend more time telling him your thoughts on football, or finding out his ideas about football? God is the foremost expert on creation, on people and on faith. God knows you even better than you know yourself, so He is the foremost expert on you too. Since, as John tells us in his First Letter, "God is love," He is also the foremost expert on love too. Therefore, God knows exactly what you need to do to be more loving. Doesn't it make sense to try to hear what God has to say? How do you hear what He is saying? God speaks to us in our hearts, in His Word, through others, and through creation. We just have to stop talking long enough to hear. Do you want to be more loving? It all begins with prayer.