



LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS

A Column by Fr. Tom

Prayer:

Not Just ME & God, but God, Everybody & me

This Ash Wednesday, as we were beginning our Lenten season and the rest of the world was celebrating a day full of hearts, flowers and love, students and teachers at a school just 50 miles away from us were in the throes of a battle for their lives. Throughout the week that followed, many people talked about what happened, how we can help, and how we might keep it from happening again. I expect and hope that those conversations will continue. Even one life lost to violence is one life too many.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking suggestion that I heard this week was, "We need to bring prayer back to our schools." I would go further – We need to bring prayer back to our homes, our families and our LIVES! Sadly, as a country, we have forgotten the value of prayer, not just for ourselves, but as a community. By this I mean, not just praying together, but praying for the human community to which we all belong – what we Christians call "the Body of Christ." St. Paul says in his First Letter to the Corinthians, "If [one] part [of the body] suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy." [1 Cor 12:26] As a Church, we are praying for the victims of the Parkland shooting and their families. I would imagine that many of you are praying individually these same prayers too. When we pray for one

another, we express our compassion for one another.

Prayer not only expresses compassion, it also builds compassion. It is for this reason that Jesus states, "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." [MT 5:44-45] In this statement from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges us to, not only pray for our family and friends, but also to pray for those who make our lives difficult... "for those who persecute you." Our prayer for those who persecute us is not for their demise, or even necessarily for their change, but instead, it is a prayer for a change in us, a prayer that our love may increase [i.e. "love your enemies"].

In these first two columns of Lent, we have explored the practice of prayer because prayer changes hearts. Prayer opens up our hearts to love – first to God's love for us, then to sharing His love with one another. Last week, I talked about prayer as a two-way conversation. This week, we expand that to a three way conference - prayer is not just ME and God, but God, everyone else and me. It is only when our hearts are open to love that the other practices of Lent – fasting and almsgiving – really make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others.