

LENT 2010

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RETURN TO ME, SAYS THE LORD

Yet even now, says the LORD,
return to me with your whole
heart, with fasting, and weeping,
and mourning; rend your hearts,
not your garments.

Return to the LORD, your God.
for God is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, abounding in
steadfast love and relenting
in punishment.

Who knows whether God will
not turn and relent and leave
a blessing behind?

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sanctify a fast. Call a solemn
assembly, gather the people.

~ Excerpted from Joel 2:12-15

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VALLOMBROSACENTER

Incredible Preachers

by Fr. Patrick LaBelle, O.P.

Preaching is important to Dominicans in a special way. St. Dominic's vision was a grand community of preachers bringing the Good News to all people. As all Christians are sent to preach, he made his Order available to all of the baptized community. I feel great pride and gratitude to be a member of this "band of preachers" and certainly attribute my call to the witness, the preaching, of Dominican women. I had the good fortune to be educated at their hands for twelve years, and look back at those years as essentially important to me and to those I may touch through my own preaching.

Countless Americans can turn to women from religious communities to attribute success and pay homage and gratitude to their example of service, prayer, virtuous living, and variety of preaching in the church of the United States. Religious women preach as they serve the poor, as they teach, as they minister to the sick and lead the community in liturgical prayer - always as examples of the possibility of grace at work in our world. These women are identified primarily by the prayerful ways in which they serve. This is their essential gift to the life of the church. While there are various styles and hallmarks for each religious group, the very center of their gift continues to be the ways in which they preach, by which they bring the Good News.

During these times when not all seem able to recognize the greatness of this gift to the whole church, we want to declare ourselves to be grateful recipients. When times are troubled, and when these women religious enter into places of need regardless of the circumstances, they do so with no expectation of grand expressions of thanks. But all appreciate knowing that those served by their giving recognize their generosity.

In August, Vallombrosa Center is making a retreat available for any woman religious interested in having a week of peace, prayer, rest and renewal. We intend to make the experience as rich and meaningful as possible and welcome any financial and prayerful help that you can give. Most women religious have very little money. They have never been paid their worth in dollars and cents. We can offer each sister this week of thanks for \$535. We hope to have sufficient scholarships to allow any who want to join us to do so. If you are able to contribute financially, just send the gift to me at Vallombrosa. If a financial contribution is not possible, then let us know the prayers or sacrifices you will offer for them during their days of prayer. And you can be sure we will let the Sisters know how many were willing to help.

This is just a small gesture of gratitude, but we hope it's a fitting way to express our feelings at this time.





Fasting and Feasting

The word Lent comes from the Old English *lencten*, the name for the season we now call spring. It referred to the lengthening of the days after the long winter. This is the time of the year when the coldness of winter gives way to warmer days, and when the deadness of winter gives way to new life: buds on the trees, crocuses peeking out of the frozen earth, baby lambs and calves frolicking in the spring sunshine. As new life is being re-created in nature the same is happening in our spiritual lives; we seek to renew our lives in Christ through self-examination, through penitential practices such as fasting, and through almsgiving.

During the early days of the Church, Lent was a 40-day retreat for those Catechumens receiving Baptism at Easter. Holy Saturday was the spiritual culmination of the Catechumens' faith journey, with a day of strict fasting and prayer, with a holy vigil, and eventual entrance into the sacred mysteries in the early hours of Easter morning. Gradually, the community members began to engage in self-scrutiny and fasting in solidarity with these early Catechumens, and Lent was born. Originally, Lent began on Quadragesima (Fortieth) Sunday, but Pope Gregory the Great moved it to a Wednesday, now called Ash Wednesday. Gregory is also credited with the ceremony that gives the day its name. As Christians came to the church for forgiveness, Gregory marked their foreheads with ashes reminding them of the biblical symbol of repentance (sackcloth and ashes) and mortality: "You are dust, and to dust you will return" (Gen 3:19).

Today we understand that Lent is a time for purification and enlightenment, not only for those joining the Church, but also for us already baptized as we prepare to renew our own baptismal promises. There are many Lenten customs and one of the common practices of Lent is fasting. Fasting, however, should not be seen as a

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denial of the flesh or punishment for our bodily sins but as a practice leading to the enhancement of our joy at the Easter feast. Fasting, to be truly effective as a spiritual discipline, ought to include some self-examination of the lives we lead and the choices we make, and fasting ought to help us understand the plight of those for whom fasting is not a choice, but a necessity.

Here are a few suggestions:

Fast from instant gratification, and feast on long-term good practices.

Fast from compulsive consumerism and feast on generosity to those who have so little.

Fast from unwholesome food choices, and feast on a renewed sense of health.

Fast from riches and feast on simple pleasures.

Fast from guzzling gas, and feast on saving our environment

Fast from mindless entertainment and feast on meaningful time spent with the Lord in prayer and reflection.

Fast from negativity and worry, and feast on the realization that we are very much loved by God.

We at Vallombrosa wish for you a happy and fruitful *lencten* season.

Vallombrosa Staff

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The Catholic Church in the World: A Guide to Engagement

There's no denying we live in troubled times. It seems like every day brings news from around the world of another economic failure, another political conflict, another natural disaster. With our lightning-fast communications, we are barraged with such information all day, every day.

Taking time away, retreating into private meditation, spending time with God in prayer and worship is essential, and a great consolation of the faith. It's the only way to maintain a healthy spirituality, one that balances the pressing concerns of our world with the longer view we find by stepping away into God's timelessness. We know from the Gospels that Jesus Himself regularly retreated into prayer, seeking the comfort and nourishment of the Father.

Indeed, we may be tempted to retreat altogether, and to regard our Catholic faith as a purely private matter, a place to go for rest and refreshment when the world is too much with us. However, as theologians Kenneth and Michael Himes have observed, "the one who retreats from the cares and concerns of his brothers and sisters because outside concerns seem a distraction from God simply does not know what the word "God" means in Christian discourse. Thus we cannot abandon the attempt to construct a society which makes the good life (however we may understand that) possible for human beings." Jesus, after all, always returned from prayer to his disciples, to the hungry crowds, to his work on earth.

Here at Vallombrosa Center, we are dedicated to providing a place for prayerful retreat, but we also believe that we must gather our renewed energies and inspiration to engage with the world as Jesus did – eyes

wide open, committed to God's work, trusting that our faith will inform and sustain our efforts. There is no doubt that the Catholic tradition provides us with powerful intellectual and historical means to guide us. But we are living in times of rapid change, and we cannot avoid the expanding awareness of social and environmental problems that in turn calls for effective response. We must continually seek new knowledge and new ways to apply that knowledge living as disciples of Jesus in the place and work and relationships to which God has called us.

Our 2009-2010 Sunday afternoon speaker series is designed to do just that – to focus on various aspects of engagement with the world so that we can act more effectively, and more boldly, as Catholics. Thus far, we have had the pleasure of hearing three distinguished speakers. To begin, Stanford Emeritus Professor James Sheehan provided us with a framework to understand both the internal and the external political challenges of a pilgrim church making its way through

human history. Kirk Hanson, Professor and Director of the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, then spoke on conducting business ethically in an unethical world, and the ways that the Church might learn from



contemporary business ethics. Fr. Michael Sweeney, President of the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology at the General Theological Union in Berkeley, explored the particular role of lay Catholics immersed in the world. All of the lectures have been followed by lively exchanges as we seek ways to put into practice the ideas presented.

Vallombrosa Center continues the series as the new year unfolds. On January 24, in a lecture co-sponsored by the Catholic Community at Stanford, Cathleen Kaveny, Professor of

both law and theology at Notre Dame University and columnist for *Commonweal* magazine, will address "Law, Morality, and the Culture Wars." On March 21, Stanford Emeritus Professor Alain Enthoven, the eminent healthcare expert whom we hear consulted often in the media these days, will consider "Health Care: To Reform or Not to Reform?" On April 18, in recognition of Earth Day, spiritual guide James Neafsey will speak on "Ecological Conversion: What St. Francis Can Teach Us," a consideration of the environmental consciousness and reverence for creation that is increasingly emphasized by Pope Benedict and other Catholic leaders.

We hope that you join us for our Sunday afternoon speakers and for the lively discussions that follow. These occasions are not only intellectually stimulating; they also inspire a sense of the future that we might still shape for ourselves and those who come after. As theologian Jurgen Moltmann has written, Christianity teaches the passion for the possible, and that "*the door of hope always remains open.*"



Saint Ignatius College Prep

Saint Ignatius College Prep in San Francisco offers a four-day retreat, called Kairos, to students in their senior year. Kairos is a structured retreat that challenges students to reflect on their relationships with self, others, and God. Rooted in Ignatian spirituality, the retreat aims to cultivate an awareness of God's presence in daily life, and the freedom to respond to this presence in hope and trust. Because of the intensive introspection, prayer, and faith-sharing on Kairos, a retreat facility is needed that fosters honesty, openness, reflection, and warmth.

We at Saint Ignatius Prep have chosen Vallombrosa Center for its peaceful and contemplative environment, its user-friendly facilities, and most of all, its gracious hospitality. The center's design offers a variety of meeting spaces and easy supervision of our students. And the staff value and respect our work;

they are always asking how they can be more helpful and accommodating of our needs. They even set up volleyball nets and a Frisbee course so our retreatants can have more fun during their breaks. And the food is wonderful!!

We are blessed to have the hospitality and care of Vallombrosa. The center truly facilitates what a retreat should be – an experience of the love of God, and the freedom that comes with knowing this love.

—Brian O'Keefe

Brian O'Keefe is the Kairos Coordinator at St. Ignatius College Preparatory in San Francisco, CA. He received a Master of Divinity from the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, CA in 2007 and has been working at St. Ignatius since, both as a Campus Minister and an English teacher.



Quick Look Calendar

January 24, 2010 *The Catholic Church in the World: "Law, Morality and the Culture Wars"* with Cathleen Kaveny

February 6, 2010 Engaging the Heart: Catholic Marriage Preparation

February 21, 2010 Lenten Prayer Service with the Vallombrosa Choir

February 21 - 25, 2010 Busy Persons Retreat

March 5 - 7, 2010 Private Silent Retreat

March 21, 2010 *The Catholic Church in the World: "Health Care: To Reform or Not To Reform?"* with Alain Enthoven

March 26-28, 2010 *Keeping the Faith: Lenten Retreat*

March 27, 2010 *Forgiveness: The Healing Act - Retreat* with Susan Cabrera

April 3, 2010 Engaging the Heart: Catholic Marriage Preparation

April 18, 2010 *The Catholic Church in the World: "Ecological Conversion: What Saint Francis Can Teach Us"* with James Neafsey

April 24, 2010 *Red Sea: The Journey Through Separation, Divorce and Beyond - Retreat* with Victoria Mac Donald

May 9, 2010 Vallombrosa Mother's Day Mass and Brunch



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