

Recipes for the Soul ...

I was looking for my mother's Macaroni and Cheese recipe for Fridays during Lent. 20 years ago, it was a big hit in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend's weekly paper, Today's Catholic. I have misplaced it, but I am quite sure that it was from an early 1950s Betty Crocker Cookbook. The most important detail is using extra sharp cheddar cheese for a nice tangy cheese taste. So instead of food recipes, I give you two recipes for the soul - a poem for Lent and a poem for Easter.

To Keep a True Lent

ROBERT HERRICK, 1648

Is this a Fast, to keep
The Larder lean?
And clean
From fat of veals and sheep?

Is it to quit the dish
Of flesh, yet still
To fill
The platter high with fish?

Is it to fast an hour,
Or ragg'd go,
Or show
A down-cast look and sour?

No: 'tis a Fast to dole
Thy sheaf of wheat
And meat
Unto the hungry soul.

It is to fast from strife
And old debate,
And hate;
To circumcise thy life.

To show a heart grief-rent;
To starve thy sin,
Not bin;
And that's to keep thy Lent.

Robert Herrick (1591 – 1634) was an English priest who served for decades as vicar in a Devonshire church. He published over 2500 poems in his lifetime.

Benjamin Sáenz, "Easter," from Calendar of Dust, Broken Moon Press, 1991. Sáenz (1954 –) grew up in rural New Mexico and studied theology before he took up writing. He teaches at the University of Texas at El Paso and has received numerous awards for his work.

Easter

BENJAMIN ALIRE SÁENZ, 1991

My mother woke us that Sunday - her voice
a bell proclaiming spring. We rose
diving into our clothes, newly bought.
We took turns standing before mirrors,
combing, staring at our new selves.
Sinless from forty days of desert,
sinless from good confessions, we
drove to church in a red pickup, bright
and red and waxed for the special
occasion. Clean, polished as apples,
the yellow-dressed girls in front
with Mom and Dad; the boys in back,
our hair blowing free in the warming
wind. Winter gone away. At Mass,
the choir singing loud: ragged
notes from ragged angel's voices;
ancient hymns sung in crooked Latin.
The priest, white robed, raised his palms
toward God, opened his mouth in awe:
"Alleluia!" The unspoken word of Lent
let loose in flight. Alleluia and incense
rising, my mother wiping her tears
from words she'd heard; my brother and I
whispering names of statues lining
the walls of the church. Bells ringing,
Mass ending, we running to the truck,
shiny as shoes going dancing. Dad
driving us to see my grandmother. There,
at her house, I asked about the new word
I'd heard: resurrection. "Death,
death," she said, her hands moving downward,
"the cross - that is death." And then she
laughed: "The dead will rise." Her upturned
palms moved skyward as she spoke. "The dead
will rise." She moved her hands toward me,
wrapped my face with touches, and
laughed again. The dead will rise.

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CROSS LINKS

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Dear friends of Holy Cross,

The season of Lent is upon us once again, a season that helps us deepen our grasp of the gift we have received on Calvary and to enter more fully into that saving mystery with every aspect of our lives. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving tweak our self-centeredness and sense of self-reliance and help us remember that all that we are and all that we have are gifts from God himself. Often we give up sweets or swearing for these 40 days, but I invite you (as I invite myself) to go a little deeper this year. Rid your lives of some of the things the clutter your path to heaven: clean out your closets, reduce your wardrobe, get rid of the small appliances that fill your shelves. Let go of the false security they provide and open space in your heart to become more reliant on our heavenly Father. If you eat out several days a week, skip one and donate the savings to a soup kitchen or your parish; if you drink a four-dollar Starbucks coffee every day, go without and spend the time you save standing in line praying for the needy of your community. Commit an hour or two a week to helping at a local school - give your time and deepen your connection with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Who knows, perhaps 40 days will be enough to create some lasting habits and help us celebrate the resurrection with true Easter joy.

EASTER PRAYER

If there are specific individuals (living or dead) you would like us to remember during this Easter season, or specific intentions, jot them down on the enclosed prayer slip and send it back to us.

No offering is required, but any offering given will support the apostolic priorities of Holy Cross.

The family of Holy Cross has lost several members in the past months and we ask your prayers for the repose of their souls. **Br. Tom Tucker, C.S.C.** (November 30), a Detroit native, spent his entire ministry around South Bend and at Notre Dame assisting at Holy Cross Parish and the Sacred Heart Parish Center for many years. For six years, early in his career, he even made the altar bread for all of campus! Br. Tom loved to fish and to tell a few fish stories along the way. We were all caught by surprise with the unexpected death of **Fr. Ron Wasowski, C.S.C.**, (December 5). After teaching science and earth science at Notre Dame, King's College, and Portland, Ron had recently retired and was turning his attention to other projects. A South Bend native, he had found a home in Portland and will be greatly missed there. **Fr. Donald Haycock, C.S.C.**, (December 9) passed away at Holy Cross House after a lifetime of ministry in the East. From Hazelton, PA, Fr. Haycock served as a high school teacher, chaplain, counselor and administrator, as well as a Personnel Director for the former Eastern Province for a number of years. His last twenty years of active ministry were spent in parish ministry in Rochester, NY.

It recently came to my attention that my Pumpkin Bread recipe from the October newsletter was a bust. When I double-checked it against my recipe card, it is clear why that was so. The recipe as we printed it called for 1/2 cup of flour when in fact the recipe needs 3 1/2 cups of flour. My apologies for any bowls of pumpkin paste that you may have ended up with. I would love to blame the women in the office for the mistake, but honesty requires that I admit to making the typo. Oh well, at least I know the Panforte recipe was correct. I made it six times and each one was delicious!

In this season of preparation, please remember Holy Cross as you can. Your gifts do so much to help us meet the cost of taking care of our elderly and infirmed men who have given their lives in service to the Lord and to his Church. As we tend to the old, we also educate and form the young to take their place and to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to a world in need of his healing touch. Each donation, large and small helps to make this and the fulfilment of our sacred mission possible.



PRAYER IS LIKE GOLF

The first time I ever heard Fr. Jim Buckley, C.S.C., speak, I was with a group of recent college graduates at St. Mary's College in Moraga, California for a week of orientation for the Holy Cross Associates - a post-graduate service program of the Priests of Holy Cross. We had been selected to live in small communities in four cities around the western part of the United States and serve low income or marginalized people in some way. Fr. Jim was our director in Portland, Oregon and he helped us to embrace the four pillars of the program - ministry, community, simple living, and prayer. That is why we were sitting in a conference room in California listening to him and three others in a panel discussion.

The panel's topic that day was prayer. The material was daunting for me, a guy who knew that he should pray but was unsure exactly how to do that. I have come to find out over the next three decades that I was not alone in my hesitation. Too many young people are told to pray and talked to endlessly about prayer, and yet are not introduced to personal prayer in any meaningful way. Young people will say that priests, and teachers, and parents talked a lot about prayer, but never actually prayed with them. Never having had prayer modeled for them, they frankly admit that they do not know how to pray.

So, there we were, feeling uncomfortable at another discussion about prayer, when Fr. Jim put us at ease. "Prayer," he said, "is like golf. You always talk a better game than you play." And that was it. He looked around at the group and he smiled wryly. During the rest of the session, we didn't talk about the benefits of prayer, or the Christian responsibility to worship to God, or what some fifth-century mystic said about prayer. We prayed.

In the days to follow, we were taught or retaught how to pray in various forms and with different techniques. We learned how to pray alone and in small groups. We were let in on the little secret that every prayer style does not work equally well for every person or across the varied seasons of life. And we became more comfortable with the notion that everyone struggles at times in their prayer lives. Just when we hit our spiritual stride, something knocks us off kilter - oversleeping one morning, bad news at work, or an inattentiveness to prayer that creeps in because things seem to be going so well - and suddenly it is as if we are back on square one, learning the habit of prayer all over again.

The good news is that, when it comes to prayer, most people talk a better game than they play. It doesn't mat-

ter that we sometimes fall down and stop praying for a while. What matters is that we get back up, make the sign of the cross, and get back to it. And even when our own game is weak, we can still share the gift of prayer with others who are seeking to know how to pray. In fact, the effort of sharing the gift can get us back into the routine ourselves.

People in our world, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, are starving for a relationship with God and for a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Spiritually lonely, they are looking for companions to help them get started on their journey. Any of us can be that friend. We don't have to be St. John of the Cross or Hildegard of Bingen to qualify for the role, just a person of goodwill trying to walk the path of faith who, though self-aware of our own weakness and imperfection, is willing to shepherd another on the journey. But key to the effort is prayer, not talking about prayer but prayer itself.

In the 1990s, I taught junior high school for several years. In my first year, my sixth-graders were responsible for leading the whole school in a Triduum prayer service on the day before Easter Break began. The service outline had been used before and the script I received was a long narration about our salvation and its rootedness in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Essentially, it was a docudrama of salvation history. It was many things, but it wasn't prayer. At best, it was a description of prayer.

With a lot of hard work, my sixth graders transformed this play into a multi-stational prayer experience. We spent weeks of religion class talking about liturgical prayer and how it worked. We recrafted texts about prayer into actual prayers that sixth-graders would pray in the name of the assembly. Kids took their parts as presiders, lectors, and acolytes seriously. They threw themselves into the practice of ritual, and grew in practical understanding of the importance of solemn gestures, formalized movements, and the seriousness of public prayer as a communal act of worship. They became so familiar with what we were doing that they could be formal without being stiff or rigid. Even the "rehearsals" became like prayer for them and they couldn't wait to lead the rest of the school in our prayer experience.

From the moment Rebecca stood up in her alb at the front of the assembly, made the sign of the cross and greeted us with a liturgical greeting, everyone there - teacher, student, Mom and Dad - knew that this celebra-

tion was different. And we spent the next hour in prayer, led in our efforts by a group of twelve and thirteen-year olds. And it was breathtaking and beautiful.

After a reenactment of the Passover of the Red Sea through that powerful reading from Exodus, we recalled Christ's example of service as Rebecca washed the feet of other students. Cross and candles then led the whole school in procession from the parish hall to the Church where Howard led us through the Stations of the Cross. It stands as the singularly most prayerful celebration of the *via dolorosa* I have ever been a part of. Parents were misty-eyed as they watched their children claim their baptismal birthright and obligation to proclaim their faith in Christ. It was stripped down, spare and elegant; but mostly it was prayer.

The school then processed to the playground where Christine led us in a celebration of our own baptisms, sprinkled us with water, invited us to share a sign of peace, and sent us forth to live the faith we had just celebrated. While a water ritual on the playground had the makings of a disastrous ending, it wasn't. Classes went back to their rooms to gather their things for the Easter Break, but all was serene. Students and teachers walked away still caught up in the celebration. My kids were unable to explain how they felt about the experience. Though they had worked hard to get ready, in the end they had simply prayed and led others in prayer. The experience was nothing short of an experience of the holy.

Not all such moments are so dramatic and are perhaps more long lasting in the life of a young person. When I was a young priest, Mrs. Cindy Esch taught junior high religion for us at Christ the King School in South Bend. (I think she is still there, God love her.) Having taught the students different kinds of prayer (petition, praise, silent listening, etc.), she wanted them to experience private prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Every Fall, she required the sixth-graders to give up half of their lunch recess every day for a week. After lunch and before heading outside, she brought them into the church for 10 minutes of silent prayer before the tabernacle. This lasted for a week. After that, they were never required to do it again in their time at school, but were welcome to go any recess after that to spend time with the Lord.

At first I thought it was an exercise in futility, but I couldn't have been more wrong. From the first Fall, I was never in the church during recess where there wasn't at least one student sitting in silent prayer. Some visited a

minute or two, some the whole twenty-minute recess. Perhaps they were praying for a sick friend, a deceased grandmother, or maybe they were laying down the burden of their lives: loneliness, the meanness of classmates, or even having been the mean one. Maybe they were just enjoying the only silence they could find in their day. Whatever it was - sixth, seventh, and eighth grade girls and boys were regularly to be found sitting or kneeling before their Lord. Mrs. Esch didn't talk about prayer, she taught them how to pray, and gave them the opportunity to do so.

Back when I was teaching, my sixth graders loved to celebrate morning prayer. The lighting of a candle by the prayer leader started each day and gathered the class into a community of prayer. Led by a different student each week, we sang an opening hymn and then recited a psalm in two choirs. The kids loved the ritualized prayer and would often get lost in its rhythms. Another student would read a passage from scripture and then we would recite the Benedictus together. Students then offered up intercessions each morning and these could be quite moving. Kids prayed for their parents, and grandparents, and sick pets, too. They prayed for family members in crisis and kids in the class who were out sick. Over time, they began to pray for each other, especially those who were having a rough patch in their lives. They even prayed for themselves in times of need. And the prayer was immediately efficacious in that they started to treat one another better as they realized that some classmates went through life carrying heavy burdens. In time, they began to see each other with a clearer vision. After an Our Father, the leader prayed the closing prayer and entered the day changed because of our prayer.

Young people need to be encouraged in prayer at school and at home. Commuting parents can explain how they pray the rosary every day on the way to work for the needs of the family and of the world. Then they can teach the rosary to their kids and pray it with them. Grandparents can explain how they offer their efforts each day to the Lord and teach their grandkids how to do the same - then do it with them for a while. Who is going to teach your child, niece or nephew how to make an *examen* at the end of the day, if not you? Don't worry if you are not a prayer expert. Remember that prayer is a lot like golf, we all talk a better game that we play. And also like golf, we get better with practice.