

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



GOING FOR THE ETERNAL RING...

There's a story told about a Catholic priest who was working in the inner city. One evening when he was on his way back home, a young thug came down an alley behind him and poked a knife against his back. The man said, "Give me your money!" So the priest opened his jacket and reached into an inner pocket to remove his wallet, thus exposing his clerical collar. "Oh, I am sorry Father," said the thief. "I didn't see your collar-I don't want your money."

Trembling from the scare, the priest removed a cigarette from his shirt pocket and offered it to the young man. "Here, he said, "Have a smoke on me." "No, I can't do that" the mugger replied, "You see, I gave them up for Lent." I guess you can tell that's an old story! Thieves these days probably don't think too much about Lent and if they do, they should give up stealing!

Well, we are now in the first week of Lent which is the Church's forty day season of preparation for Easter. We should have by this time, decided to do something for Lent-a form of penance. This penance could indeed involve "giving up something" like cigarettes, deserts, alcoholic drinks or candy.

But perhaps a Lenten penance could also mean "doing something" as well. That "doing something" could mean praying more each day, attending daily Mass or the stations of the cross. It could mean assisting our neighbor in some way or being a little more charitable to family members-perhaps visiting a sick relative or friend. It might involve helping out in a soup kitchen or helping out around the parish in some capacity. Whatever our penance is, it should be authentic and sincere.

What is the idea behind self-denial and penance? Is it because the Church is a real "kill joy" and wants none of us to be happy on this earth? Absolutely not! The Church wants us to do penance so that we can truly be happy. By getting "a hold on ourselves" and our selfish tendencies we can become much happier people. By saying "No" to the cocktail, the cookies or the ice cream sundae we are in reality strengthening our moral muscles which tend to get flabby.

Recently I read about Tom Brady, the quarterback for the New England Patriots. He is over forty years old but is in excellent physical shape thanks to a very healthy vegetarian diet and an intense exercise routine that he performs every single day. That kind of a regimen might not appeal to most of us, but for Brady and his team it does get results-five Superbowl wins and the ring-although not this year!

Our prize as Catholic Christians is not a Superbowl ring but a greater one-eternal life and happiness with Jesus Christ. Saint Paul tells us: "Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things; they do this to win a crown of leaves that wither-but we a crown that is imperishable."

We might consider Lent as our "spiritual spring training" as Christians. Oftentimes we can get out of shape physically as the years go by. But maybe the same thing could be said about our souls-maybe we're "out of shape" when it comes to our religion and the things of faith. This forty day Season of Lent is a time for us to get back in the game-to do better and to be better followers of Christ.

Let's make this Lent really count this year so that on Easter Sunday morning we can really celebrate the glorious and risen Lord!

*Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome*