

FROM THE DESK OF **Fr. Julius**

Brothers and Sisters in Christ; Grace and peace!



This past Wednesday the universal Church marked the start of the forty-day Lenten period: our foreheads were marked with ashes, which is a sacramental inviting us to enter deeply into the Church's journey with Jesus. We may be enticed to set goals for our own personal achievements, but that should not be the case; instead, we need to keep our eyes fixed on our Lord, journeying with him as he overcomes the serious battle with the tempter. Praying with our daily liturgy helps us keep company with our Lord.

In our first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses encourages the Israelites to bring their first fruits to the Lord's altar. The wandering *Aramean* Moses refers to is Abraham, our father in faith who answered God's call to leave his own land to worship the

one true God. We know this was not Abraham's personal goals, but God the Father's. We see in the second reading that St. Paul's early Christians were comprised of Jews and Greeks, and although the Jewish people worshipped the one true God, Greeks were pagan worshippers of gods and goddesses. How could these two distinctly different peoples get along in the same Church? When our Lord Jesus is the center of our world, all peoples and cultures become a unified force.

In our Gospel reading, Luke recounts how Jesus is tempted by the devil. The devil is cagey. He knows how to quote scripture and can even appear to us as our helper. During our Lord's hour of trial, the devil first plays upon our Lord's personal hunger after 40 days of fasting: "If you are Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Then he tries to entice our Lord with power, promising all of the kingdoms of the world, if Jesus would worship only him. Finally, as if to test even God, the devil challenges Jesus to throw himself from the parapet of the temple, that since he is "Son of God," he would not be injured. How fiercely the devil wanted to produce sin in Jesus! As a caution, even the devil can quote the scriptures!

Drawing upon deep wells of scripture, for we could have no higher endorsement of the Old Testament than these moments, we see how Jesus flawlessly triumphs over each mockery and temptation. In this effective use of the Word of God, Luke makes it clear that despite the devil's shrewdness, it is for his own self-seeking advantage; take note...the devil is *never* for the common good of humanity. Jesus is the perfect model of resistance to the spiritual enemy, and absolute obedience to the will of God. That is why our Lord is our advocate to look up to especially during temptations: that in every scriptural encounter we observe, Our Lord follows that path of fidelity to the Father which is our deepest yearning. As a result, through persistent prayer, fasting, penance, reconciliation, and almsgiving this Lenten season, we yearn to grow in new life in Christ. Daily temptations may continue to assail us; these are hard, but we must remain steadfast with the Word. Using the words of Fr. Richard Veras, "Our hope is not in our strength, but in gazing upon Christ who first gazes upon us."

A rich Lenten Season!