

## New Hope in a World of Uncertain Outcomes – by Fr. Dean McFalls

At 6:00am on Wednesday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, I'm sitting in a cold room at my computer. Beginning today, our nation is poised for some historical events.

The first major move belongs to the Feds. Chairman Ben Bernanke faces a real dilemma: if he cuts interest rates further, the dollar loses more value internationally and American credit becomes even less credible. If he doesn't, Recession looms and the sub-prime Titanic may sink beyond the reach of any new rescue operations. Should he allow the current state of affairs to govern his choice, or hold tight with a more long-term, global perspective? President Bush said it last Monday in his State of the Union Address: "...As we meet tonight, our economy is undergoing a period of uncertainty...At kitchen tables across our country, there is a concern about our economic future." His proposed tax rebates may well not be enough.

The nation also awaits eagerly the results of Super Tuesday, February 5<sup>th</sup>.

Twenty-two states will hold primaries or caucuses to determine which of the front-runners will prevail. It looks as if a two-candidate bout for each party (McCain v Romney, Clinton v Obama) is almost a done deal. This record-setting campaign has outspent any political race in the history of the world, but has surely helped Americans to re-think our values and future.

Between these two major events, a third one will dominate the nation's attention. In fact, the number of Americans watching the Superbowl will no doubt far outweigh the number of those who vote in any election. I wonder whether the prospect of a Patriot victory might further hurt the campaigns of New York's Senator Clinton and former Mayor Giuliani.

Yet all these Mega-Events will steal attention from a far more important day which, as quietly as the rising sun, will inaugurate a new season of hope and renewal. As the Christ-child was born unnoticed into a world of political and economic tensions, this day, February 6<sup>th</sup>, will steal in silently.

And yet, for more than a billion people across the globe, this day will hold the promise of deliverance and new life. It is called Ash Wednesday. And the season it ushers in is called Lent. Far from a litany of empty rituals and self-defeating scrupulosity, this six-week span can be full of God's grace.

Traditionally a 40-day period of intense preparation for the Easter Triduum (commemorating Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection, from the Last Supper of Holy Thursday to the great celebration of Easter Sunday), Lent is a spiritual desert rich in hidden blessings. The best ways to discover

these treasures, and to prepare our hearts for the glory of Christ's conquest of sin, death, and the Devil, are Prayer, Fasting, and Christian Charity.

If you want to participate in the greatest victory of all human history, and to make that victory your own, turn your attention for a moment from the economy, the elections, and football and focus on your relationship with God. In the end, the most important battle you'll fight will be one which determines your eternal destiny and will affect every activity of your life.

The battle is for your soul, and for the souls of those you love. And Lent is our preparation for, and participation in, this spiritual warfare – a struggle ultimately of cosmic proportions in which every one of us has a stake.

Ash Wednesday and Lent challenge us to look far beyond the economic “bottom line” and our own immediate interests to deeper, more enduring values. They remind us of the global community and the legacy we will leave for our children. Echoing the prophetic call to justice, compassion, and humble submission to the God of all Creation, this great season leads us beyond candidates, personalities, and party affiliations to the enduring concerns of every true religion: that the hungry be fed, the captives be freed, the destitute find dignity, and the desperate hear the Gospel of hope.

What matters, in God's economy, is not persuasion but principles, not income but integrity, not physical force but strength of character, and not “winning” but living the Good News of redemption with every fiber of our being. As St. Paul put it, “...what matters is a New Creation” (Gal. 6:15).

I believe that God, in His infinite wisdom, placed Ash Wednesday at the very edge of all the major events I've mentioned in order to remind us of where we're all heading, and of the standards that should govern our lives.

Far from distracting us from the urgent concerns of our day, Lent directs us to the very heart of the human condition and impels us to work toward lasting solutions for every crisis of our day. That is why the first reading of Ash Wednesday's Mass cries out: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard." (Isaiah 58:6-8).

*-Fr. Dean McFalls*

## Ash Wednesday / *Miercoles de Ceniza*

*Mass and Service Schedule, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008*

*Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Lathrop (858-4466).*

*Ashes will be given out only during our services.*

7:00am: Liturgy of the Word, Ashes, *Bilingual*.

8:00am: Mass, Ashes, *Bilingual*.

12:15pm: Liturgy of the Word, Ashes, *Bilingual*.

4:30pm: Mass, Ashes, *Bilingual*, with Students.

6:00pm: Mass entirely in Spanish, with Ashes.

7:30pm: English Mass with some Spanish, Ashes.