

- For those of you who were here to see the arm relic of St. Jude this past Thursday, you know what an amazing event it was. Truly, it was like a tsunami of grace hit our parish!
 - I'm so very grateful to all of you who came, and especially to all of you who volunteered to help with the day. Several of you put in many, many hours to ensure the smooth running of this major event for our parish. So, thank you to all of our volunteers.
 - As a pastor, this past Thursday was one of those days that not only put a big smile on my face, but a great sense of peace and joy in my heart.
 - While I certainly have a renewed love and respect for St. Jude, who, like Jesus, is a grandson of our patroness, St. Ann, my big "take-away" from the day was just how God smiled on this parish and so lavishly poured out His graces upon us.
 - For starters, it was a marvelously sunny, 65-degree day *in the middle of February*. While I'm already aware of a few healings that took place and some answered prayers, it was very clear that so many people were having very powerful spiritual experiences with St. Jude.
 - There were lots of smiles, lots of tears, lots of joy and peacefulness amongst everyone here. And that kind of thing only comes from God. Thus, I've spent the past couple of days simply thanking God for being so generous with His graces to our parish.
 - The graces poured out here on Thursday were just one more proof, one more sign that God loves us – and so much more than we can possibly imagine. So, we should do our best to love Him in return, and to the best of our ability. Lent is a great time to do this!
-
- This past week with Ash Wednesday we entered into the holy and penitential season of Lent, which is our time of the year to go out into the desert spiritually. But for Catholics the 40 days of Lent is not simply a time for us to imitate Christ's 40 days in the desert.
 - While Lent is a time of penance – of more intense fasting, deeper prayer, and more generous almsgiving – Lent is also a time to renew and deepen the covenantal relationship we have with God through baptism. It's a time to love God more deeply.
 - As Lent is a season in which we, as a people, draw closer to God and His mercy, this first Sunday of Lent is a very appropriate time for us to consider our covenantal relationship with the Lord.
 - This theme of *covenant* found in all of today's readings is probably the most frequent theme in all of the Bible. Indeed, if there's one theme or thread that runs through the entire fabric of Sacred Scripture, it is the notion of covenant.
 - A covenant is a binding agreement or bond between two parties. The common term for covenant found in the Old Testament is *berith*, which is derived from the Hebrew word for *fetter*. Thus, it means to be tied to.
 - The nature of covenants is therefore much more personal than a simple contract. A contract is an agreement for an exchange of goods or services. A covenant is much more because it requires the complete giving of one's self to another.
 - There's a mutual exchange in a covenant that goes well beyond the exchange of goods or services. A covenant is an exchange of self. It's a binding of two parties through love.
 - In fact, it is a promise to love the other party no matter what: for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part. It's an unbreakable bond, the obvious analogy of which is marriage.

- Our first two readings today speak of how God formed a covenant with Noah after the Great Flood, and of how the Flood prefigures the sacrament of Baptism, through which we enter into our own covenantal relationship with our Lord.
- In the second reading St. Peter tells us that our baptism saves us. This is because through baptism, the death and resurrection of Jesus is made present within our souls.
- Just as the flood prepared the world for union with God by ridding the world of sin through water, baptism now prepares us for union with God by ridding us of sin through water.
- Through baptism we are inextricably bound up with God. We are fettered or tied to Him, and we make the agreement to live as He would have us live. And He ties Himself to us!
- Baptism forms a covenant in which the Lord, the Righteous One, gives Himself fully to us who are unrighteous. And He does this for our salvation.
- Please understand that being baptized not only means we're Christians, but it's also the agreement to live like a Christian! And as baptized Christians we are called to give ourselves fully to God, just as spouses give themselves fully to one another through marriage.
- We give ourselves fully to God through fervent and regular prayer, by keeping ourselves free from sin, and by repenting and believing in the Gospel. We give ourselves fully to God by loving Him above all else and seeking His will rather than our own.
- During Lent, through the practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we make reparation for those times we've failed to live up to the demands of our covenantal relationship with our Lord. We also remove those spiritual obstacles within us that prevent us from giving ourselves to our Lord as we should.
- You see, we do not do penance simply for the sake of doing penance. As I've mentioned so many times before, the practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are not hollow rituals, but effective tools that help us deepen our relationship with God and draw closer to His mercy.
- Not only do they help us make reparation for sin and develop greater detachment from the things of the world, but these practices help us imitate Christ and share His mercy with others.
- They tie us more closely to the Lord, and thus deepen our covenantal relationship with Him.
- My dear friends, we have entered the desert of Lent. And while it's true that we're entering into the desert, it's not a place devoid of beauty or peace. The Lenten landscape is full of the beauty of God's covenantal love for us.
- As we make our way through this desert, let us acknowledge our sinfulness, ask for God's mercy, and renew our covenantal bond with God through our prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
- Let us fetter ourselves all the more closely to our loving Lord by being faithful to our covenant with Him that was formed at our baptism. And know that in so doing, He will tie Himself more closely to us and secure for us a place in Heaven.
- St. Jude, pray for us.