

1st Sunday of Lent March 13, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

During this season of Lent I have been reading a book that I came across last year, entitled *Small Surrenders*, by Emilie Griffin. She quotes another author who said, "If grace is so wonderful, why do we have such difficulty recognizing and accepting it? Maybe it's because grace is not gentle or made-to-order. It often comes disguised as loss, or failure, or unwelcome change."

She then tells a story of when she was a young woman she went to New York city looking for a job. Jobs were tough to find, and she became desperate. One day she went into church and prayed for a job, and amazingly within a day she had a job. But she said she felt that she had not received it as a grace, she felt that it was not an answer to prayer but that she would have landed it anyway. A friend of hers asked her, "Have you ever noticed how often people pray for things, and then they forget to thank God for the things they received in prayer?" She slowly began to realize that there are graces bombarding us daily but we are not fully tuned to them. And so she began to realize the value of attentiveness.

But the graces that bombard us do not always seem to be good things, things that we would choose. I have been spending some time with a parishioner who has been battling cancer for some time. It has been a long and difficult journey, not without a great deal of pain and at times questions and a bit of depression. It is difficult to imagine that cancer is a grace, but at least what is happening now is that now he can see many other graces accompanying the illness. He has never doubted the love and care of his wife, but is now even more aware of it. He has been a little surprised at the love and attention from his children, and overwhelmed by visits and love shown by other family members and friends. He has grown in his acceptance of his illness, and is at peace. Sometimes illness and loss makes us more attentive to God's graces.

We have entered the season of Lent. I love the metaphor, the symbol of the desert we are presented with on this first Sunday of Lent. There are some pictures of deserts on our monitor in the atrium, along with pictures of the Marti Gras and our Ash Wednesday services and the Heifer program. The desert is a place of silence, a place to be alone, a place where we leave the things of the world behind us. It is a place where we can find our true self, a place where we can find God. That is what Jesus did in the desert, he faced the devil, resisted the temptations, and remained faithful to his Father.

We need to go to the desert this Lenten season. We can't go to a real desert with sand and silence, but we can find our own desert. I have been gifted with a new desert this year. My cousin and her spouse, Kay and John, have a wonderful house close by, on Pepperhill. It has a wonderful family room in the back, with a large window looking into the back yard. They are in Florida but have given me the key to their home, and invited me to use their home whenever I want. I am going there for lunch every day during Lent, a light and quick lunch, and then spending an hour or so in a chair looking out the window, observing the coming of springtime. I pray my breviary there, hopefully more attentively, I do some spiritual reading, I slow down in the presence of God.

I believe we all need to find a desert during this season, Many of you do not have the good fortune I have, a deserted and quiet home and the time to spend some time there. But I believe we all need a place and some time during this holy season. Maybe its our bedroom, or basement room, or car on the way to work. It is a time to slow down and ask ourselves important questions. What am I doing with my life? Do I allow God into my life? Am I attentive to the graces that God is giving me each day of my life?

Two more opportunities to enter the desert this weekend.

Sunday evening we have our first evening on forgiveness, entitled *Forgiveness in the Family*, at 6:30.

There will be an opportunity to give to the relief of those in Japan who were devastated by the earthquake and tsunami.