**LENTEN ROUTINE**

On Ash Wednesday we enter the Season of Lent. Could we come up with a routine for our spiritual health? Now is the appropriate time to try to do this. Our spiritual workout may include: 1. To pray; 2. To read the Word of God; 3. Time for silence and contemplation; 4. Sharing with others; 5. And living more simply so that others may simply live.

**PRAYER**

Before we admit our own sins and weaknesses to Jesus Christ, we have first to meet him in prayer and silence, and learn that he loves us more than we could ever imagine, and that he accepts us, warts and all. All of this requires a holy discipline, a mindset that sees as Jesus sees; a spiritual routine that helps us overcome our selfishness and greed, to recognise the lies we tell ourselves and others, to be aware of our anger and rage, our indecent thoughts and desires and our insensitivity to the needs of others.

**READ THE WORD OF GOD**

If we can attend daily Mass one or two days a week, that’s a great avenue of prayer, of listening to the Word of God and receiving the graces of the Eucharist together as a community. For those busy workers who cannot make a weekday Mass, why not just text, email or Facebook one another and encourage one another by sharing a prayer, a favourite quote or a scripture passage?

You may also like to go on a day or weekend retreat together. Talk about a great opportunity for spiritual refreshment! We are blessed in our Diocese with an abundance of retreat centres.

**TIME FOR SILENCE**

While connecting with others is a great spiritual exercise, never forget the importance of silence. So, after you have shared with one another, why not turn off the mobile phone or TV or iPod for a time of silence and prayer or reading the Scriptures or a spiritual book to lift our minds and hearts to God?

Think of all those times that we spend waiting at traffic lights or in the checkout queue. These can be moments to turn our thoughts and prayers to God. Quite often, I will turn off my radio in the car when I am driving to spend some time in conversation with God. The conversation can be about trivial matters, such as what I am doing that day, what I need help with, or how I can improve on what I did yesterday. But God loves that kind of real conversation and close relationship. I also find that the Rosary and the Angelus are good travelling companions.

**SHARING WITH OTHERS**

If we are serious about our spiritual progress, we can be helped by connecting with others from time to time for mutual support. Why not, for example, join a Lenten group this year in your parish, undertaking our Lenten Program, “Arise”. In doing the program you will encounter prayer, reading the Word of God, time for silence and contemplation and sharing with others. It can be a great spiritual workout.

Our annual Project Compassion appeal is but one way to share what we have from the sacrifices we make to enable people in developing nations to help themselves. The theme this year is, “Food for Life”. Food is essential for all life, yet many of the world’s poorest people do not have food security. That means they live from day to day, uncertain of how to afford or how to access their next meal. The Project Compassion appeal aims to help the world’s poorest people establish sustainable food, walking with them as they free themselves from the burden of food insecurity and helping them to develop new and improved income streams for a better future.

**LIVING MORE SIMPLY**

We will begin to fulfil the final element of our spiritual routine, that is, living more simply, when we remove unnecessary distractions such as the media’s obsessive worship of celebrities and when we start to recognise the Spirit of God in people who are sick, suffering or depressed fellow travellers on our journey, and want to bring some hope into their lives. Then we cannot fail to value the dignity of every person, no matter what they look like, if we have taken the time to fast from the commercials hawking the perfect body and confusing our needs with our greed.

Can I live the simple life that will free me up to be spiritually alive to Jesus, who saved and redeemed me by dying on the Cross? Can I be extra sensitive to the needs of others and more compassionate and forgiving? Can I make more space in my life for goodness and sharing?

**Conclusion**

Just as we are keen to promote our physical health, this spiritual routine of prayer, spiritual reading, silence, sharing with others and living more simply can promote our spiritual health by giving us insight into the value of our faith, and provide a spiritual context for living and finding peace of mind and heart.

May this Lent help us to grow spiritually fit so we can reflect something of God’s presence and the light of Christ in our broken world.

*Based on and quoting Bishop Peter Ingham’s 2015 Lenten Pastoral Letter, "The Five-A-Day Spiritual Routine".*