

THE VALUE OF SACRIFICE: “ENDURANCE” AND LENTEN OBSERVANCE

So, how have you been doing on your Lenten resolutions since Wednesday? Have you tired of your sacrifices after just four days? Bite off more than you can chew? Or perhaps you never quite came up with a plan for your **prayer, fasting and almsgiving**. While not meaning to diminish the difficulties of our sacrifices this season, I do wish to contextualize them. While the finishing touches were being completed for the opening of this Cathedral in March of 1915, a drama was playing out nearly **9000 miles away** that powerfully highlights the resilience of the human spirit and the sheer will to survive. For more than two decades, I have been fascinated by the accounts of the intrepid early 20th century Arctic and **Antarctic explorers** who risked everything in their desire to conquer lands yet unseen. I visited the Antarctic Peninsula in 1999, serving as a chaplain aboard a passenger vessel. Okay, I wasn't exactly roughing it! For two weeks I enjoyed delicious food, listened to fascinating lectures and read several books about the continent.

But one account especially stood out, that of the failed attempt to cross the Antarctic continent in 1914 and the subsequent struggle for survival endured by the crew, led by Ernest Shackleton. The harrowing nearly two-year account is detailed in a 1999 book by **Caroline Alexander** entitled “The Endurance: Shackleton’s Legendary Antarctic Expedition.” The fascinating book contains copious previously unpublished black and white photographs. Even if you are not an Antarctica aficionado, you’ll enjoy this book! The expedition’s vessel was appropriately named *Endurance* and following its landing on the Antarctic peninsula, the goal was the first-ever **overland crossing** of the entire continent. (The South Pole was first reached by Norwegian Roald Amundsen in 1911.)

The *Endurance* set out with 28 men and 50 sled dogs, but by January 20, 1915 the ship had become trapped, just 400 yards from open water and with landfall in sight. The ice slowly began to create increasing pressure against the hull. Many attempts to free the ship from 18-foot thick ice failed. The *Endurance* was now adrift in the pack ice. By July, the situation was grave. “What the ice gets, the ice keeps,” Shackleton wrote. They were then 1200 miles from civilization. On October 27, 1915, the men abandoned the ship. In his diary, he wrote “I pray God I can get the whole party to civilization.” No one knew where they were, somewhere in the middle of the Weddell Sea, camped out on an ice flow. The **nearly depleted supplies** were rationed—just one biscuit and three lumps of sugar per day.

Yet, the men **did not despair**. He kept them “on task,” assigning them daily tasks, etc. On April 9, 1916, the ice flow split and they made a dash for Elephant Island, taking one week to reach the island in 17 hours of darkness per day at -20° F. They made it to **Elephant Island**. But now what?! Though they were nearly 800 miles away, Shackleton decided to try to make a run for South Georgia Island, leaving 22 men behind. He knew that no one would know where to look for them, so he set off with six others in an open 23-foot lifeboat for the windswept and **desolate island**, knowing it was the only hope. Constantly battered by **50-foot waves**, they endured gale-like conditions. But it was their only chance at survival.

But they took two days to try to make a landing in a tiny Bay. But it was opposite the Whaling Station—the wrong side of the island. He crossed the British territorial island twenty-two miles on foot without maps; at one point they slid down a 1000-foot embankment, battered and bruised. On May 20, 1916, three **tattered men stumbled** into the Whaling Station. Shackleton had to introduce himself to the station chief, whom he previously knew, so sickly did he look. Less than three days later, he left the station and heads back to Elephant Island. It took three months and four attempts to find the coast of the island. How many of his men were still living? **All 22 had survived**. All in all, the crew drifted on the ice for just over a year. It is an amazing story of endurance in the midst of untold struggle and against all odds. It provides sobering realities but also it is a story of triumph by perseverance.

While our sacrifices pale in comparison to Shackleton’s, they strengthen the human spirit and when motivated by love of God, they are efficacious and moments of grace. But too often, we shy away from sacrifice and self-denial, rather than embracing them. **Challenge yourself this Lent**. Through **prayer, fasting and almsgiving**,

turn away from what is easy, comfortable, satisfying to the pallet, and offer up your sacrifices in hopes of growing in virtue. The older I get, the less intimidating the reality of sacrifice has become. No, I surely do not relish it; I would much rather avoid it. However, I have come to see its value in the spiritual life. If we **tame our appetites and passions**, we will be more disposed to receive God's grace. During Lent, we embrace the Cross, mindful that Jesus endured tremendous suffering on account of our sins. The real question is, "What will we do for Jesus this Lent?" May you have a blessed and fruitful Lenten season.

- Better late than never. Only halfway through last Sunday did I recall it was the **75th anniversary** of the taking of **Iwo Jima** by fearless Marines! You have all seen the **iconic photo** of the soldiers raising the flag. I added a prayer for the afternoon Mass and the organ sounded the military hymns as both a prelude and postlude. We must never forget the bravery of our armed forces.
- If you or someone you know is grieving following the tragic choice of abortion, I invite you to experience the healing mercy of Jesus Christ on an upcoming retreat sponsored by **Rachel's Vineyard**, a wonderful retreat program supported by your CSAF donations. More information may be found on page 6 of today's bulletin.
- In his 2020 Lenten Message, **Pope Francis** calls us to greater works of charity: "Charitable giving makes us more human, whereas hoarding risks making us less human, imprisoned by our own selfishness." I am most grateful for **your tremendous generosity** here at the Cathedral and express my gratitude for your continued support.
- *Crede ut intellegas*. From Augustine's Sermon 43 on Isaiah: "A man says to me: 'Let me understand in order to believe.' I respond: '**Believe, that you may understand.**'" Bingo! We **begin** with belief; then, God graces us to trust and better understand our Catholic faith.
- Holiness knows no age limits. **Venerable Carlo Acutis**, an Italian teenager, who died of leukemia at age 15 in 2006, will soon be beatified. He began a website about Eucharistic Miracles that gave rise to "The Eucharistic Miracles of the World," an international exhibition highlighting such occurrences. His mother said, "Jesus was the center of his day." He is buried in St. Mary Major Church in Assisi.
- **Thank you** for your support of the **Catholic Services Appeal**. We had a strong first weekend. Envelopes remain in the pews on this follow-up Sunday.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector