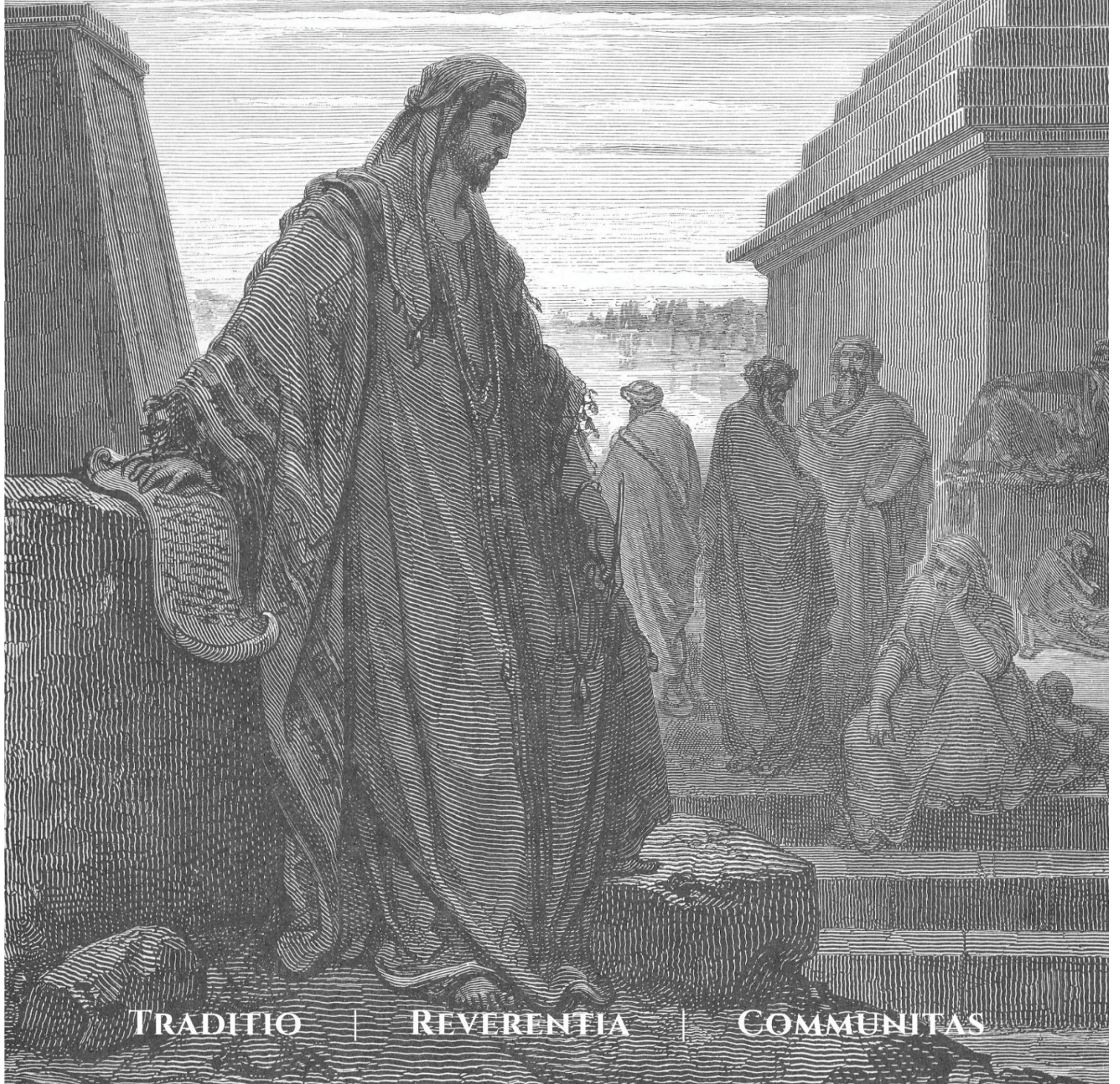


THE ORATORY OF SAINTS  
GREGORY & AUGUSTINE



TRADITIO

REVERENTIA

COMMUNITAS



## Welcome to the Oratory of Saints Gregory and Augustine

The Oratory of Saints Gregory and Augustine is pleased to welcome you. We are an apostolate of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis faithful to the teachings of the Church and striving to grow as a family of faith through the celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass and other Sacraments.

In the First Book of *The Confessions*, the other great St. Augustine (of Hippo) wrote the following: "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee." Whether you are curious about the traditional Latin Mass and interested in exploring its beauty, searching for a parish community where you and your family will feel at home, or seeking rest for your heart, we hope that the Oratory of Saints Gregory and Augustine can provide that respite for you.

Our bulletin serves to provide information about the weekly activities occurring here at the Oratory. Along with our website ([www.stlouislatinmass.com](http://www.stlouislatinmass.com)), the bulletin is your point of contact with the ever-increasing activities at the Oratory. I hope this will give you some sense of the grace of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. I am delighted that God has brought you here! *Oremus pro invicem!* ~ The Very Reverend Monsignor C. Eugene Morris, Rector

### MASS AND SACRAMENTS

#### Sunday Masses

- 6:30 am (Low Mass)
- 8:00 am (Low Mass)
- 10:00 am (High Mass)

#### Weekday Masses

- Monday thru Friday: 6:30 am & 12:15 pm
- First Friday: 6:30 pm
- Saturday: 8:15 am

#### Confession

- Sunday: 7:30 am – 10:30 am
- Monday thru Friday: 11:00 am – 12:00 pm
- Wednesday: 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm
- First Friday: 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm
- Saturday: 7:00 am – 8:00 am

#### Adoration

- Wednesday: 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm
- First Friday: 1:00 pm – 6:00 pm (starting 2/6/26)

#### Divine Office

- Sunday: Prime @ 7:20 am; Terce @ 9:40 am; Vespers @ 2:30 pm
- Monday: Vespers @ 6 pm; Compline @ 6:30 pm
- Tuesday & Thursday: Compline @ 6:30 pm
- Wednesday: Vespers @ 6 pm; Compline @ 6:30 pm

**Infant Baptism** – Baptisms are normally scheduled on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays of the month beginning at 10:00 am. Families expecting newborns and anticipating that they will be baptized here at the Oratory should schedule their baptism at the earliest convenience by contacting the Oratory office.

**Adult Baptism** – If you are interested in becoming Catholic or if you are an adult Catholic not yet confirmed, please contact the Oratory office for more information about adult catechesis.

**Matrimony** – Please contact the Oratory office at least six months prior to the desired date for the rite of marriage. The date is reserved after consultation and confirmation from the Rector of the Oratory.

**Extreme Unction/Visitation of the Sick** – Contact the Oratory to arrange the sacrament either at home or in the hospital.

### STAFF/ORGANIZATIONS

- **Rector:** Msgr. C. Eugene Morris  
[rector@oratorysga.org](mailto:rector@oratorysga.org)
- **Vice-Rector:** Fr. Michael Rennie  
[vicerector@oratorysga.org](mailto:vicerector@oratorysga.org)
- **Deacon:** Deacon Steve Pieper, MD  
[deacon@oratorysga.org](mailto:deacon@oratorysga.org)
- **Administrative Assistant:** Donna Mueller  
[office@oratorysga.org](mailto:office@oratorysga.org)
- **Facilities Manager:** Ben Schubert  
[facilities@oratorysga.org](mailto:facilities@oratorysga.org)
- **Auxiliary:** Anna Kalinowski  
[auxiliary@oratorysga.org](mailto:auxiliary@oratorysga.org)
- **Almonry of Ss. Gregory & Augustine:**  
[almonry@oratorysga.org](mailto:almonry@oratorysga.org)
- **Altar and Rosary Society:**  
[altarandrosary@oratorysga.org](mailto:altarandrosary@oratorysga.org)
- **Altar Servers:**  
[servers@oratorysga.org](mailto:servers@oratorysga.org)
- **Choir:**  
[choir@oratorysga.org](mailto:choir@oratorysga.org)
- **Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD):**  
[ccd@oratorysga.org](mailto:ccd@oratorysga.org)
- **Co-Op:**  
[co-op@oratorysga.org](mailto:co-op@oratorysga.org)
- **Events:**  
[events@oratorysga.org](mailto:events@oratorysga.org)
- **Knights of Columbus:**  
[kofc17355@oratorysga.org](mailto:kofc17355@oratorysga.org)
- **Schola:**  
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[tsg@oratorysga.org](mailto:tsg@oratorysga.org)
- **Ushers:**  
[ostarii@oratorysga.org](mailto:ostarii@oratorysga.org)
- **Young Adults:**  
[youngadults@oratorysga.org](mailto:youngadults@oratorysga.org)
- **Online Giving:**  
<https://www.osvhub.com/st-louis-latin-mass>

### CONTACT US

314-644-2144 / [stlouislatinmass.com](http://stlouislatinmass.com)  
7230 Dale Avenue, Richmond Heights, MO 63117

**FROM THE RECTOR**

This last Sunday before Ash Wednesday, the virtue to which the Church draws our attention is faith. In the Old Testament, Abraham is truly our father in faith. He models the required disposition to be in relationship with God trusting in the Lord even when what is asked is beyond his understanding. Abraham always sought for God and was rewarded for his fidelity becoming the father of many nations. Of course, the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham is Christ who through His Paschal Mystery makes complete the covenant that was established long ago. This relationship of love into which the Triune God draws each of us requires on our part the deliberate and intentional response of faith calling out to Him for mercy and healing. Now, maybe more than ever, faithfulness and fidelity must be the words upon which we build a solid foundation with God. Only God saves us; only God protects and safeguards us; only God makes sense of the world in which we live. It is this failure to trust in God and to live a life of faith that has brought modern man to the place where he now finds himself. In our time, we are waking up from the fog and confusion of a politically correct society that sought through any and all means to eradicate truth, especially related to the dignity of the human person. Grateful for on-going societal changes, as believers we can never be drawn into a false hope in secular powers. All leaders, need to be held accountable and to be called to faith in Christ and in His Church. As is always true in the spiritual life and the transformation of the world, this accountability begins with each of us. The journey to His cross will reveal our weakness, frailty, and sinfulness. Our faith in God will make it possible for us to cooperate well with Him, overcome our sinful ways, and enjoy the rewards of everlasting life.

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Sunday, 15 February:**

- Prime @ 7:20 am
- Confessions @ 7:30 am
- Coffee Hour @ 9:00 am
- Terce @ 9:40 am
- Vita Communis Bowling Party @ 12:30 pm (@ Epiphany Lanes...ALL ARE WELCOME!!)
- Vespers @ 2:30 pm

**Monday, 16 February:**

- Server Training @ 4:30 pm
- Vespers @ 6:00 pm
- Troops of St. George @ 6:30 pm
- Compline @ 6:30 pm

**Tuesday, 17 February:**

- Compline @ 6:30 pm
- Vita Communis Shrove Tuesday dinner @ 7:00 pm

**Wednesday, 18 February: ASH WEDNESDAY**

- Holy Hour/Confessions @ 5:00 pm
- Vespers @ 6:00 pm
- Holy Mass @ 6:30 pm
- Compline @ 7:30 pm

**Thursday, 19 February:**

- Compline @ 6:30 pm

**Friday, 20 February:**

- Stations of the Cross @ 1:15 pm

**Saturday, 21 February:**

- Holmes Baptism @ 10:00 am
- O'Toole Baptism @ 11:00 am
- Schenk Baptism @ 12 Noon

**Sunday, 22 February:**

- Prime @ 7:20 am
- Confessions @ 7:30 am
- Terce @ 9:40 am
- Coffee Hour @ 11:30 am
- Vespers @ 2:30 pm

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**PILGRIM VIRGIN MARY STATUE 2026**

02/08-02/15 D'Cunha	02/15-02/22 Alexander
02/22-03/01 Stolarski	03/01-03/08 Henry
03/08-03/15 Santschi	03/15-03/22 Kiser
03/22-03/29 Agnew	03/29-04/05 Buyle

04/05-04/12 Lejedal	04/12-04/19 Grizzle
04/19-04/26 Turntine	04/26-05/03 Haulard
05/03-05/10 Kelly	05/10-05/17 Jones
05/17-05/24 Holman	05/24-05/31 Carapella

Drop off and pick up the statue in the vestibule (back of church). Place the statue bag on the floor to left of the Oratory table. To join or to quit the schedule contact Sharon Alexander saalexa@sbcglobal.net

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**MASS INTENTIONS**

**Monday, 16 February – *Feria***

6:30 am: Dennis McDonald (d)  
12:15 pm: James Silas Sweeney

**Tuesday, 17 February – *Feria***

6:30 am: Sr. Maria Veronica  
12:15 pm: MaryKay Fulton

**Wednesday, 18 February – *Ash Wednesday***

6:30 am: Pro Populo  
12:15 pm: Br. Macarius of Jesus Christ Crucified  
6:30 pm: William J. Stader III

**Thursday, 19 February – *Feria***

6:30 am: John Mendel (d)  
12:15 pm: Mary Rooney Sweeney (d)

**Friday, 20 February – *Feria***

6:30 am: Mary Rheinheimer  
12:15 pm: Jeff Parker

**Saturday, 21 February – *Feria***

8:15 am: James Jay Zych (d)

**Sunday, 22 February – *1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent***

6:30 am: Pro Populo  
8:00 am: Mary Knollmeyer (d)  
10:00 am: Jim Smith (d)

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~ 02/08/2026 ~

Weekly Collection Total	\$ 10,807.00
Online Giving	\$ 8,526.69
Total	\$ 19,333.69
Needed	\$ 16,800.00
Year to Date Total	\$ 604,722.14

## **BLESSING OF ITEMS: NEW PROCEDURE**

Going forward, the blessings of religious items will take place after the 8:00 am Holy Mass at St. Joseph Altar. This will happen on the Second Sunday of each month. In this way, items can be blessed and retrieved in a more timely manner. This process will replace bringing items to the rectory to be blessed. **ALL ITEMS TO BE BLESSED MUST BE BROUGHT TO THE ST. JOSEPH ALTAR ON THE 2ND SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH BEFORE HOLY MASS.** Those who desire to have items blessed should bring them to the St. Joseph Altar before the 8:00 am Holy Mass with their names clearly marked on the items to be blessed. These items should be left on the St. Joseph Altar. If there are a large number of items, they can be placed around the altar but should not impede the distribution of Holy Communion. Two blessings will be given: one for rosaries and one for all other items grouped together. There is no need to take items from their packaging. **This new process begins Sunday, 8 February 2026, therefore the rectory is not accepting any additional items to be blessed as of 9 February.**

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## **BLESSING & IMPOSITION OF THE BROWN SCAPULAR**

Twice a year at Advent and Lent, the Oratory invests its faithful in the Brown Scapular. To assist those who desire to have a scapular blessed and imposed on them, **on the First Sunday of Lent, 22 February 2026 after the 8 am Holy Mass**, there will be the blessing and imposition of scapulars on those who present themselves at the communion rail. Please bring your own scapular, have it unwrapped and off your neck if you are already wearing it. As there might a great number of people presenting themselves for this blessing, the only thing that will be blessed this day is the scapular. Any questions, please contact Msgr. Morris directly via email at [rector@oratorysga.org](mailto:rector@oratorysga.org).

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## **SEPTUAGESIMA & THE LENTEN SEASON**

The season of Septuagesima began 1 February 2026 providing the opportunity to better prepare ourselves for the Lenten Season which begins on Ash Wednesday, 18 February 2026.

**Stations of the Cross** will be celebrated on the Fridays of Lent after the conclusion of the 12:15 pm Holy Mass. **\*\*We will not have Stations of the Cross on 6 March due to Adoration.\*\***

The schedule for **Holy Week**: **HOLY THURSDAY @ 5:00 PM; GOOD FRIDAY @ 3:00 PM; HOLY SATURDAY @ 2:00 PM.** This information is shared early so that you might plan your schedules accordingly.

All of this information will continue to be available both in our bulletin and online. In a few weeks there will be a flyer of the Liturgical schedule in the bulletin that will have all this information for our Lenten season.

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## **FSSP VISIT: HOST FAMILIES NEEDED**

Dear Faithful,

I am excited to announce that the seminarians of Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary (FSSP) will be making a trip to St. Louis over 25 April – 28 April. Over 60 traditional seminarians and priests will come to St. Louis for a few days of touring before they buckle down for the last push through their semester.

The seminary has reached out to our Oratory to coordinate some shared events, such as liturgies and receptions where our faithful may have the chance to meet the seminarians.

There is also the opportunity for host families to house seminarians (25 April – 27 April, i.e. three nights). Please see the following criteria for this:

1. No minors (under 18 years old) may be in the household at any time during the seminarians' stay.
2. Host families should be comprised of at least one adult man (no single female hosts).
3. Host houses should be within about a 45-minute commute from Ss. Gregory & Augustine.

If you happen to meet these criteria and you are interested in hosting, please contact Anna Kalinowski at [auxiliatrix@oratorysga.org](mailto:auxiliatrix@oratorysga.org) no later than 27 March.

Please follow the bulletin for future announcements about this visit. Peace in Christ, Msgr. Morris

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## **FSSP VISIT: DONATIONS WELCOME AND APPRECIATED**

If you would like to make a donation to the Oratory to offset our expenses to cover the seminarians' meals, etc. please write FSSP in the memo line of your check and drop it in the collection basket or mail it the rectory. You can also make an online donation under the "FSSP visit" fund.

<https://www.osvhub.com/st-louis-latin-mass/giving/funds>

All donations are tax deductible.

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## **FIRST FRIDAY EUCHARISTIC ADORATION: CLARIFICATION AND APOLOGY**

It has long been a desire of mine as rector to have more Eucharistic Adoration at the Oratory of Ss. Gregory and Augustine. For a brief time, several years ago, we did have extended periods of adoration on Wednesdays and Fridays; unfortunately, the community was unable to sustain that with consistent adorers. Sadly, there were times when Our Lord was left alone in Church which of course should not and cannot ever happen. I had hoped that the community could begin adoration again with the First Friday of each month for 2026. It was anticipated that we would start on Friday, 2 January 2026. Again, we were unable to find a sufficient number of the faithful to be present at Adoration and to fill all of the hours. I made the decision to cancel adoration. This decision, however, was not communicated to all those who had signed up and who came to Church on 2 January expecting Eucharistic Adoration. I am truly sorry for any inconvenience this confusion caused and I am hopeful that those who did commit would be willing to do so again going forward.

Our hope is that Adoration will take place every First Friday afternoon going forward to honor the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As a reminder: faithful are needed to adopt an hour of adoration to ensure that the Blessed Sacrament is never left alone. To sign up for an hour, please email Anthony Jones at [events@oratorysga.org](mailto:events@oratorysga.org)

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## **FREE BOWLING AT EPIPHANY LANES: ALL ARE INVITED!**

Oratory faithful of all ages are invited to Epiphany Lanes on Sunday, 15 February, 12:30-2:30 pm, for a bowling party courtesy of Vita Communis Young Adults. Children should be accompanied by an adult. Food is available for purchase. Epiphany Lanes address: 3164 Ivanhoe Ave, St. Louis, MO.

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## **2026 CALENDARS**

The calendars for 2026 for the Oratory Community have arrived!! The calendars are available in the main vestibule and at the side doors. You are kindly asked to initially take one

calendar per household. Once everyone has had a chance to pick up a calendar, there should be more available in late February for those who need another one. This year's calendar comes from the Transalpine Redemptorists, a community of traditional monks rooted in the Redemptorists charism who practice both the contemplative and active life. Their motherhouse is in Scotland and they have recently founded a house in Montana.

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#### **COAT DRIVE ~ THANK YOU!**

The Knights of Columbus are grateful to all who donated coats and hats this year. They collected a total of 32 coats and 4 hats. Thank you for your generosity.

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#### **IN GRATITUDE**

As we continue to rejoice in the mystery of the Incarnation and thank God for His mercy, I want to express my gratitude to all the faithful of the Oratory for your on-going monetary support for the work of the Oratory. I am particularly grateful for your generosity not only to the weekly commitments needed to sustain the Oratory, but also to the success of Giving Tuesday in early December and your generosity to the Advent fundraiser for the Men's Schola. In a short period of time, there were many financial expectations set before you and the community has responded generously to these various requests. Please know of my daily prayers for our whole community and my personal gratitude in being able to serve a community so generous and faithful.

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#### **EPIPHANY WATER, SALT, AND CHALK 2026**

Epiphany water, salt, and chalk have been blessed and are available to the faithful for as long as it remains. You are free to use your own containers for Epiphany water. All of the blessed water will be available until we run out.

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#### **CRITICAL/EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

The recent violence against Christians, and particularly the Catholic Church, is a serious cause for concern. While being vigilant and aware of the various situations in which we might find ourselves, we must guard ourselves against living fearfully in the world. Assisting in finding this proper balance, the Oratory of Ss. Gregory and Augustine has plans in place in the event of a critical or emergency incident. In consultation with the Rector of the Oratory, the Ushers of the Oratory will be the men in charge of responding to any emergency situation. All the faithful of the Oratory are asked to follow their directives in the case of any critical incident or emergency situation. A proper chain of command, led by those with the necessary training, will assist the whole community if a critical and/or life-threatening situation should present itself. I am grateful to Dr. Robert Morgan and Tim Turtine for their leadership and expertise along with other members of the community and all of the ushers for undertaking this necessary and serious responsibility. If anyone is interested in serving in this capacity, please contact Dr. Morgan at [ostiarri@oratorysga.org](mailto:ostiarri@oratorysga.org) to become an usher which will facilitate your participation. Finally, if any member of our community has concerns, please communicate those directly to Rector.

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#### **STREET PARKING**

As our community continues to grow, parking on Sundays is at a premium, especially at the 10:00 am Holy Mass. If you are parking on the street, please do not block any driveways. It was recently communicated that a driveway was blocked and the

person living there was unable to get out. Fortunately, this neighbor was willing to wait until the conclusion of Holy Mass. Sadly, not all of our neighbors are happy about our presence or our growth and it is important that we work with them even if they do not want to work with us. Let's not provide any opportunity to cause or create a problem. Please be conscious of working to be good neighbors and do not block drives or park in places that are not available to us.

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#### **ADULTS SEEKING THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION**

We welcome those interested in becoming Catholic. To get started in that process within the OSGA community, please email one of our priests for an introductory meeting. Their contacts are available in the bulletin. After this, candidates for Initiation at the Oratory will be directed to complete a registration form with our Administrator.

Catechism classes are held in the St Joseph Room (rectory basement) generally on a bi-monthly basis on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays from 4:00-5:15 pm.

The content surrounds a set of topics central to Catholic teaching, as set forth by Msgr. Morris. Deacon Pieper moderates most meetings through a question and answer format and hopes to promote sincere dialogue with the candidates regarding those topics and/or related questions. The intent is to communicate Christ and His Church. Sacraments are offered on an individual basis, on a rolling schedule throughout the year, after mutual discernment by the candidate, our deacon, and priests.

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#### **NEW PRO-LIFE COORDINATOR**

The whole community would like to thank Rory (Aurora) Miller for serving as the coordinator of Pro-Life activities for the Oratory for the past several years. Rory has done a great job leading the Oratory's involvement in fostering the culture of life. She has elected to step down from this position and we are in need of a new volunteer coordinator.

The duties of the position in its current configuration include:

- Attends diocesan pro-life meetings at Rigali Center.
- Coordinates 40 Days for Life twice each year.
- Goes to monthly meetings at the pro-life Advocacy group.
- Gathers information about upcoming Pro-Life events and submits this for posting and publication at the Oratory of Ss. Gregory and Augustine.

The new coordinator is encouraged to explore other avenues for the Oratory community to remain involved in and part of the Pro-Life efforts of the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

If you are interested, please contact the rector, Msgr. Morris ([rector@oratorysga.org](mailto:rector@oratorysga.org)). In advance, thank you for your consideration and generosity.

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#### **RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION**

For those in our community who are new to the Traditional Latin Mass, when you approach the altar rail for holy communion it is the custom to begin filling in the altar rail at the far right near St. Joseph's altar and fill in the rail until its end at the Marian altar. This practice is not impacted by which side of the Church you are seated. You are allowed, and encouraged, to switch sides in order to keep the communion line moving. This is particularly important when there are two sacred ministers distributing Holy Communion. So too, do not overly delay approaching the rail waiting for others to return to their pews. If everyone moves



## Quinquagesima

15 February 2026

with attention to what is happening, there should be a flow of movement between those departing the altar rail and those approaching the altar rail. Also, for daily Holy Mass: please kneel at the rail only where the houseling cloth has been prepared for communion. Please keep in mind that we should not keep the Lord waiting but moving with grace and deliberation to the altar rail to receive our Eucharistic Lord.

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### NEW FAMILIES for JANUARY (alphabetical order)

A warm welcome to our new parishioners!

- Owen Bruns
- Barbara Cardona
- Molly Laiben
- Dan Leonardi
- Christian Reller
- The Terry Family ~ Jake & Amy, Simeon and Seraphina
- The Wilcox Family ~ Brennan & Emma
- Brendan Wilmarth

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### PRAYERS FOR THE SICK

In your charity, please pray for the following members of the Oratory who are ill: Mary Jane Bolte; Amanda Camarillo, daughter of Gregory & Nancy Latham; Heath Cheaney, son of Michael & Jaime; Jeanmarie DeCoster; Donna Hagan; Dotty Kuhlmann, mother of Donna Mueller; Mary McMahan; Kim Morgan; Donna Mueller; Michael Norfleet, son of Marsha Norfleet; Elizabeth Ryan; Mary Joseph Schenk, daughter of Nicholas & Elaine; Patrick Schneider; Sylvester Soldinie; Caleb & Sheila Ten Eyck; Lara Trudell, daughter of Sharon and Jim Alexander; Renee Weidner; and Msgr. Witt.

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### PRAYERS FOR THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

- Robert Anthony, father of Jeanmarie DeCoster
- Sheryl Ann Gibbs, wife of Jeff Gibbs
- Andrew Richard "Andy" Gilfoil, brother of Joe Gilfoil
- Shane Kiser, husband of Maggie Kiser

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### USHERS' SCHEDULE

#### Sunday, 15 February

**6:30 am** Jim Alexander\*, Evan Adair

**8:00 am** Jeff Martin\*, Michael Nelson, Kenny Buyle, Terry Conway

**10:00 am** Robert Morgan\*, Jordan Hermann, Mark Scheer, Zach Morley

#### Sunday, 22 February

**6:30 am** Brayden Bauman\*, Chris Bauman

**8:00 am** Michael Nelson\*, Kenny Buyle, Terry Conway, Ken Catalano

**10:00 am** Jordan Hermann\*, Mark Scheer, Zach Morley, Jesse Hermann

#### Sunday, 1 March

**6:30 am** Ben Schubert\*, Jeff Logullo

**8:00 am** Kenny Buyle\*, Terry Conway, Ken Catalano, Sam Ashlock

**10:00 am** Mark Scheer\*, Zach Morley, Robert Morgan, Cory Conway

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### + Altar Server Schedule: February – March 2026 +

Date	Time	MC at High Mass / Acolyte at Low Mass	Thurifer	Acolyte 1	Acolyte 2
15 February 2026	6:30	Jack Ryan			
	8:00	Peter Blum			
	10:00	Sebastian Petrick	Joseph Fowler	Charles Fowler	Sean Kenney
22 February 2026	6:30	Ben Schubert			
	8:00	Benedict Armesto			
	10:00	Peter Blum	Thomas Koschmeder	Cabhan Ten Eyck	Joseph Sinak
1 March 2026	6:30	Michael Norfleet			
	8:00	Matthew Rheinheimer			
	10:00	Castor Armesto	Michael Rennier	Benedict Armesto	Scott Fowler

### FIRST FRIDAY/FIRST SATURDAY

6 March 2026	6:30 pm	Peter Blum	Anthony Green	Kolbe Grizzle	Dominic Green
7 March 2026	8:15 am	Sebastian Petrick	Paul Keys	Silas Buyle	Sean Kenney

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### WELLSPRING OF TRADITION: ASHES – A POTENT SYMBOL

Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City is always crowded, but rarely more so than on Ash Wednesday. Ashes are distributed continuously throughout the day, but separately from the Mass. Wooden barriers strictly separate the left and right naves of the large gothic cathedral from the centre (main) nave. Those wishing to receive ashes enter one of the side naves. Those wishing to go to Mass as well must exit and then re-enter the main nave. From opening (06.00) until closing (19.00) the queues from ashes are so long and continuous they often stretch out from the building on to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue for a block or more in each direction. Why, in a time when the practice of religion is 'in decline,' does this custom of receiving ashes still hold a place in the lives of so many? Habit? Superstition? Something else?

Passages from various early Fathers show that Christianity adopted early on the Jewish use of ashes as a symbol of mourning and penance. However, as is the case for the origins of Jewish usage, the liturgical use of ashes doesn't leave a clear train of its evolution. Various Old Testament passages connect 'ashes,' *eper* in Hebrew, with mourning rituals; but there is also some confusion with the

word *afar*, ‘dust.’ These words are often used together, and *efer* might better be better understood as ‘dust’ in some contexts, making a link between death and penitence. In the Rite of the Red Heifer (Num 19:17; cf. Heb 9:13), the ashes of the sacrificial victim mixed with water had the ceremonial efficacy of purifying the unclean. (Some sources trace the use of ashes back even further to various pagan rituals.) Christians sentenced to do public penance once donned an outer robe of sackcloth and a sprinkling of ashes on the head, as Jews had done in time of mourning. So ashes provide, in a sense, a symbolic link between penance and death. And whence the traditional prayer formula: *Memento homo quia pulvis est et in pulverem reverteris*. (Remember you are dust and to dust you will return.)

This link has been a frequent theme of artists and poets, especially when describing the time of year in which Lent begins. The death of winter is ending, and we are eagerly awaiting a new springtime of re-birth. The analogy to willing the death of our own sinfulness and an eagerness to be re-born in baptism is a frequent theme of the liturgy in Lent. Romano Guardini, a favourite writer of both Benedict XVI and Francis, comments:

Ashes signify man's overthrow by time. Our own swift passage, ours and not someone else's, ours, mine. When at the beginning of Lent the priest takes the burnt residue of the green branches of the last Palm Sunday and inscribes with it on my forehead the sign of the cross, it is to remind me of my death.

Everything turns to ashes, everything whatever. This house I live in, these clothes I am wearing, my household stuff, my money, my fields, meadows, woods, the dog that follows me, my horse in his stall, this hand I am writing with, these eyes that read what I write, all the rest of my body, people I have loved, people I have hated, or been afraid of, whatever was great in my eyes upon earth, whatever small and contemptible, all without exception will fall back into dust.

How appropriate then, that we use this symbol as we begin the season of penance and of preparation for the celebration of the Resurrection. For we hope one day to share in that Resurrection to new life ourselves after our own death. The prayer for the blessing of ashes sums all this up well:

O God, You Who desire not the death but the repentance of sinners, look graciously upon the weakness of our human nature, and in Your fatherly love mercifully bless + these ashes which are to be placed upon our heads as a sign of humility and a pledge of Your forgiveness. We know that we are but ashes, and because of our wickedness must return to dust. May we obtain from Your mercy the pardon of all our sins and the rewards promised to those who repent.

But Lent is not only a call to conversion and penance in preparation for a new life sometime in the future. Pope St Clement's in his letter to the Corinthians makes that clear echoing the prophet Ezechiel: 'I live' says the Lord; 'I do not want the sinner's death but that he repent and live.' We hear this echoed often in the Divine Office texts in Lent. God promises to strengthen the repentant and make them sharers in his own life. And that can begin now for those who learn to be merciful as he is merciful. If our own practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are effective, they will increase our awareness of our own need for mercy and forgiveness, and for extending that to others. True conversion is a source of inner peace and, ultimately, of joy.

This theme continues throughout the early weeks of Lent. Works of prayer, penance, and purification are not ends in themselves but practical ways to experience in our own flesh and in the reality of the world around us God's merciful love (*hesed* in Hebrew). It is an unfailing love of perfect fidelity – God is always faithful. On the first Sunday of Lent the sung propers for the Mass are drawn from Psalm 90 (91). In the Tract – the longest one in the repertory – we sing almost the entire psalm. Often sung at Compline, the Church's prayer before bedtime, here we have it in a different context. We are assured that, whatever difficulties and threats and challenges we face, God hears us when we call on him. He sends his angels to bear us up and keep us safe, and we hear repeatedly that he gives us refuge under his wings as his faithful love surrounds us as a shield.

The poetry of T.S. Eliot, who grew up across the street from me behind the Cathedral, often reflects these ideas in his works, particularly after his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. Many consider 'Ash Wednesday' his greatest work. With allusions to Marian and liturgical texts threaded throughout, he prays at its end sentiments that seem appropriate for the imposition of ashes if it's more than habit or superstition:

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood  
Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still  
Even among these rocks  
...  
Suffer me not to be separated  
And let my cry come unto Thee.

Each Lent our attention is especially drawn in various ways to this call to conversion. We are invited to discover anew the value of the sacraments of Baptism and Penance in our lives. We are called to a deeper love of the Holy Eucharist by a more frequent attendance at Holy Mass. And the Divine Office, now so readily available online and on mobile devices, is ever at hand when we want to deepen our life of prayer and our understanding of the Paschal mystery that we are preparing to celebrate in the Holy Week and Easter liturgies. Accepting the mercy and love of God into our lives can change us and through us offer new hope to others.

++++  
*Our Lady of Walsingham, intercede for us who have recourse to thee!*  
*Ss. Gregory and Augustine, pray for us!*

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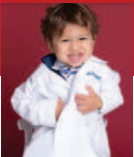
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