

Once a month, I meet together with five other priests in a support group.

We get together on a Sunday afternoon for a few cocktails, a meal, some prayer, and some recreation: this past Sunday it was watching the Superbowl, but often times it is watching a movie or playing Trivial Pursuit.

One by one, as the evening progresses --- we drift off to bed as we get tired – something I’ve notice over the years that as we age, gets to be more like nine o’clock. And then we get up in the morning and go to breakfast.

In the course of our time together – we will eventually get to what we called “*deep sharing*”.

Now it’s not that we haven’t been sharing things with each other all throughout our time together – it’s just that we want to be *intentional* about setting a time aside for anyone to share what is lying heavy in their minds or hearts, what is consuming their energy or attention, something they want some advice on – or something they are excited about.

It’s our way of committing ourselves to each other, and supporting one another, at times even challenging each other -- on our common road of priestly life and ministry.

Now I think our monthly “*deep sharing*” time is a bit similar to our annual observance of Lent. It’s not that we Christians haven’t spent time praying, fasting, and giving alms throughout the rest of the year – if that is the case, I think there may be a bit of a problem --- but it’s just that when these forty days roll around – we get a bit more intentional – or at least *hopefully* we get a bit more intentional – about these three disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. And then perhaps I this intentionality – we might establish a new standard which we keep throughout the year – long after Lent ends.

Pope Francis has declared this year a Jubilee Year of Mercy – so it’s not like we haven’t already allowed the theme of mercy to direct our minds and hearts these last couple of months ---- but during these days of Lent –

we want to “go deep” in allowing the quality of mercy to enrich our reflections on the Gospels and enrich our lives -- from now until Easter. Again, perhaps in our intentionality – we can develop an ongoing habit of mercy that directs our lives long after Lent concludes.

By intensifying our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving ---- and by our deeper reflection on mercy during these 40 days of Lent --- it can be our way of committing ourselves to each other, supporting one another – and yes, even challenging each other --- on our common road of discipleship.

May God’s mercy be with us as we begin our journey.