By Pat Haggerty

One can never be certain of the weather! Just consider winter in the Northeast this year. It's been nothing like winters past. There was a terrible snowstorm even before winter set in, and things have been fairly quiet since then. Those anticipating beautiful snowfalls and plenty of sledding have had to resort to man-made snow or trips to Vermont and Maine. New Englanders are coming to realize that there can be no certainty with the seasons. One must be prepared for anything at any time.

Looking at the seasons of nature is nothing like looking at the liturgical calendar. Now that is something to be counted on! We can count on the fact that Christmas is going to happen and that the feast days will occur when they are supposed to occur. We know that the Lenten season will guide us on our journey to the Risen Savior.

The thing we can't count on is how we will observe the season. It's all up to us! Our churches offer us many opportunities for connecting on the pathway of repentance, reconciliation, and almsgiving. We can pick up those little collection boxes in which to place our monetary offerings. We can attend the church's Lenten Mission. We can pray the Stations of the Cross every Friday, and we can go to Adoration when it is available.

All those opportunities will certainly add to our Lenten observance. However, even more important, is the spirit in which we participate in Lent. Are we thinking more about giving up things or doing things? Are we trying to find that extra time for meditation and prayer? I go back to that first reading on Ash Wednesday, which says: "Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God." (Joel 2:12-13).

To me, the emphasis is on turning our hearts to God. The essence of Lent is within us.

Oh, Lord, of Patience and Forgiveness,

Grant me the grace to walk this Lenten pathway in a spirit of reflection, of meditation, and of thoughtfulness. Let me grow as I connect with You and as I follow Your call to prayer and selflessness. Amen.