

Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary



February 13, 2018

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

THE SEASON OF LENT begins on Ash Wednesday as we gather to receive the “mark of ashes,” an exterior sign of our desire for interior change and renewal. The time period of Lent mirrors the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert, the 40 years the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness – a biblical number reflecting the passage of a generation and the emergence of a new one. Lent is an annual opportunity in the liturgical year to engage in a spiritual renewal and to prepare for Easter by returning to the Lord in every aspect of our lives through the practices of prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

PRAYER

Daily life can be occupied with many distractions which impact upon the peace in our hearts and draw us away from the practices of prayer. Lent is a time in our faith lives that invites a return to solitude, silence and prayer. Lent resounds with the words of the psalmist calling us to “be still and know that I am God.” (Ps. 46) Pope Francis has described the experience of prayer in this way, “In the face of so many wounds that hurt us and could lead to a hardness of heart, we are called to dive into the sea of prayer, which is the sea of the boundless love of God, in order to experience his tenderness.”

ALMSGIVING

The pace of life sometimes isolates those who live in poverty or with underemployment. This isolation reduces our personal contact with people living with insufficiency and those who could help can become disconnected from the needs of others. The time of Lent echoes with the exclamation, “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” (Mt. 25: 35) It is this reconnection which Lent summons in our hearts. Through acts of sacrificial giving and in being truly present to the needs of others we recognize the sacred reflection of God in another person, we see their needs and our faith inspires us to respond generously.

FASTING

When speaking of fasting, the third penitential practice of Lent, Pope Francis says, “Fasting wakes us up. It makes us more attentive to God and our neighbour. It revives our desire to obey God, who alone is capable of satisfying our hunger.” This penitential practice helps us to control our desires and to be freely attentive and open to the love of God.

This is indeed a holy season in the liturgical year. May this season of prayer, almsgiving and fasting be a time of true spiritual conversion for all of us which in preparing our hearts to rejoice with the Risen Christ at Easter!

Yours in Christ,

† Most Reverend William T. McGrattan, D.D.
Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary

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