



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Lent 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Lent is a journey from the desert of death to the springs of new life. We follow Jesus into the wilderness of the desert to renew our baptismal covenant with the Father. During this sacred time, we die to sin, and washed clean from our self-centeredness and attachment to the world, rise to divine grace and love. As we enter this privileged season, let us reflect once more on the three means we employ during this forty-day journey of penance and conversion: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Prayer. Prayer is most simply a conversation with God, and St. Paul reminds us that this conversation must be continual. The Apostle to the Gentiles enjoins us to “pray at all times” (Eph 6:18), “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17), and “be constant in prayer” (Rom 12:12). To pray this way requires effort. It demands silence, artful listening, and remaining in the presence of God. This Lent we remember two powerful ways we enter into this holy conversation: by sitting in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and through *lectio divina*, a prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture.

Fasting. The Church Fathers speak extensively on the power of fasting to break sin and open our hearts to the grace of God. Saint Peter Chrysologus writes: “Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others, you open God’s ear to yourself” (*Sermo* 43: PL 52, 320, 322). Let us remember, too, that bodily fasting is useless unless it is joined with spiritual fasting, that is, fasting from our passions.

Almsgiving. Scripture brings the three marks of our Lenten journey together and puts the emphasis on the last: “Prayer and fasting are good, but better than either is almsgiving accompanied by righteousness ... It is better to give alms than to store up gold; for almsgiving saves one from death and expiates every sin. Those who regularly give alms shall enjoy a full life” (Tob 12:8-9). Almsgiving is better because it points to charity. We remember we are not only to give materially to those in need but also give of ourselves as we love God and neighbor.

Last October, Pope Francis invited the Church into a synod on synodality. The Holy Father wants the Church to journey together in a multi-year process listening to each other, hearing the Word and celebrating the Eucharist. As we journey towards Easter, let us be united in mind and spirit. May the spiritual exercises of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving prepare us for Easter and an experience of the power of God, which “dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty” (*The Easter Proclamation - Exsultet*). Then, alive in Christ, we can go forward evangelizing, as Pope Francis would want, with *parrhesía*: “Boldness, enthusiasm, the freedom to speak out, [and] apostolic fervor” (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 129).

May the loving presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who remained faithful to her son at the foot of the cross, protect and sustain us in our Lenten journey.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre