



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Lent 2020

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Once again the Church offers us this sacred time of forty days to enter the wilderness with Jesus. Lent should be seen as a time of spiritual renewal as we take the time out of our busy lives to focus on our relationship with Jesus and others. It also provides an opportunity to grow in self-knowledge and holiness.

In many ways the Season of Lent embodies the great paradox of our faith: it is only in giving that we receive. We see this most clearly in what we often call the three pillars of Lent - prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These practices help us to give rather than receive as we focus on God, self, and others.

When we pray, we give our attention to God, offering our humble worship and adoration. During Lent we should make a concerted effort to give up some of our time for prayer. It may be a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament, praying a devotion like the Rosary or Stations of the Cross or meditating with Sacred Scripture. One may even attend daily Mass during Lent. Prayer always helps us to focus on God, who can so easily be forgotten in our busy lives.

When we fast, we are practising self-denial so that we can grow in self-discipline and self-knowledge. To be able to say no to ourselves with some regularity helps us to say yes to God more often. Here we do not just 'give up something'. We may choose to be more generous, more loving, a better son, daughter, mother, father, deacon, priest, bishop. The Sacrament of Penance, helps us to gain self-knowledge as we strive to 'fast' from our sins. We go to God with humble and contrite hearts, seeking mercy and forgiveness. Once again we will be having a Day of Penance throughout our diocese on Saturday, March 28, 2020. In many ways fasting helps us to remove the distractions of life so that we can focus on growing in holiness.

When we give alms, we think of others, especially those most in need. We know that poverty and homelessness are growing in the Niagara Region and beyond. We cannot be complacent about this need. Pope Francis reminds us that our faith in Christ means we must care for the poor and outcast. He states, "Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society (EG. 187). Almsgiving helps us to be more generous and to work for justice and peace in our world.

Just as Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, we too will be tempted. The devil may try to convince us that we do not need to do anything for Lent or he may encourage us to do too much and then we will feel overwhelmed. What is most important is that we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit just like Jesus. During these forty days ask for divine assistance, especially during moments of weakness and uncertainty. Our faithful God will always respond to our need.

Let us never forget that whatever we may 'give' during the Season of Lent, we will 'receive' far more because God can never be outdone in generosity. May this truly be a time of spiritual renewal for all within our Diocese.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name "Gerard Bergie".

Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.
Bishop of St. Catharines