



*Diocese of Fall River*  
*Office of the Bishop*  
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**“Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mk. 1:15)**

“Pour out a spirit of compunction, O God, on those who bow before your majesty...”  
(Prayer after communion - Ash Wednesday)

Dear Friends,

We all remember Lent as a time of prayer, penance, fasting, abstinence, a time to give up sweets, smoking, etc. Although all these things are good and noble, Lent is much more than that; it is a time when we are called to "Repent, and believe in the gospel". A time for change, but change can only come about when we are open to hear the Word of God and live by it.

In the first part of Lent, the Gospel texts for weekdays are taken from the Synoptics. The message running throughout is a call to a life of Gospel conversion. We can call this the "ETHICAL" section.

The Gospel readings for the second half of Lent are taken from the Gospel of John, making a presentation of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, of whom John says that all who believe in Him will have eternal life. Christ is presented as the healer and life-giver, as the one who gives life through his confrontation with death and gathers into one the scattered children of God. We can call this the "CHRISTOLOGICAL" section.

How do these two sections of the lectionary fit together and what can they tell us about the spirit of Lent?

The purpose of the first part of Lent is to bring us to compunction, contrition, and remorse. "Compunction" is etymologically related to the verb "to puncture" and suggests the *deflation of our inflated egos*, a challenge to any self-deceit about the quality of our lives as disciples of Jesus.

“...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. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.” (Joel 2:12-13)

By hitting us again and again with demands which we not only fail to obey, but which we come to recognize as being quite beyond us, the Gospel passages are meant to trouble us, to confront our illusions about ourselves. “Remember, you are dust...” From this perspective, the purpose of Lenten penance is not to confirm us in our sense of virtue but to bring home to us our radical need for conversion and for salvation. “Delay not your conversion to the LORD, put it not off from day to day.” (Sirach 5:8)

As we celebrate this Lenten Season during the Holy Year of Mercy, let us keep in mind the merciful love of God, our Father, and let us turn to Him with faith and trust. Let us rejoice in the gift of Salvation which we fully experience at the end of the Lenten Season, when celebrate the Paschal Mystery of the Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.  
Bishop of Fall River