



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

Bishop da Cunha's 2015 Lenten Message

Dear friends,

The ashes we received this past Wednesday remind us of the 40-day journey upon which we have embarked toward the Paschal Mystery. All other ritual symbols we receive become invisible. When we leave church, no one knows we were marked with the symbol. On Ash Wednesday, we keep the mark visible on our foreheads for hours. Everyone knows where we have been, what we did, and who we are. Only Ash Wednesday does this to us. However, after some hours, the ashes are worn away. What remains is not the external mark of the ashes on our foreheads, but the mark of our commitment imprinted on our minds and hearts, to live the spirit of Lent, a spirit of penance, prayer, charity, and conversion. We don't need the sign on our foreheads for the rest of Lent because we ourselves embody the sign.

Ashes were not given to us as some magic formula to protect us or to force us into something, nor are they received because it is what one does on Ash Wednesday. This would be a great disservice to something so cherished and important to our faith and to our values. However, we cannot live in the Church without the ashes of change. Ashes are for those who are willing to embrace deep down the call to conversion and discipleship.

During Lent, we tend to give emphasis to giving up the things we like – food, sweets, drinks, etc., but that is the easy part of doing penance. Perhaps a more challenging and more fruitful way of doing penance this Lent would be to give up things that will truly change us and benefit our spiritual life and the lives of those around us. We can make this Lent a time to give up things such as criticizing others, selfishness, laziness, indifference, and time spent watching TV, and devote more time spent with family.

As Pope Francis said in his Lenten message: *“As a way of overcoming indifference and our pretensions to self-sufficiency, I would invite everyone to live this Lent as an opportunity for engaging in what Benedict XVI called a formation of the heart (cf. Deus Caritas Est, 31). A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters.”* Pope Francis went on to say, *“...today, this selfish attitude of indifference has taken on global proportions, to the extent that we can speak of a globalization of indifference. It is a problem which we, as Christians, need to confront.”*

In practical terms, Catholics often choose to isolate an enjoyable food or activity to forego during this 40-day period. However, during this Lenten Season, I challenge you to look for ways not only to make a sacrifice or “give something up”, but to also find something extra to do. As individuals or as families, we should commit to one practice that we can take part in to help our neighbors. This way, we will not only be motivated by an inward piety, but our charity will be directed outward towards the betterment of all our brothers and sisters.

As the holy Season of Lent unfolds, we turn to God and pay attention more intensely than usual to the presence of Christ in our lives. During this time, the Church invites us to examine our actions, our attitudes, and the quality of our faith with renewed scrutiny. Through our practices of generosity, sacrifice, service and charity, we rediscover the true meaning of this penitential season. We prepare ourselves to participate fully in the glorious hope of the Resurrection. May our journey through Lent prepare us for the greatest feast of the Church year—Easter—and to receive the blessings of the new life it promises.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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