



Diocese of Fall River

Office of the Bishop

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.

Bishop da Cunha's 2020 Lenten Message: ***Entering in the Lenten Season***

During Lent, special attention is given to three specific tenets of our Catholic faith -- almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. The foundation for these practices can be found in Matthew's Gospel chapter 6, verses 1-18. When practiced with a heart inclined toward pleasing God and personal conversion, these actions can be truly transformative, especially in light of Jesus' Paschal Mystery -- His Passion and death and Resurrection.

Lent is a time of spiritual interior conversion, penance, and sacrifice. There is a beautiful balance for faith practiced in private, for only the Lord to see, and as a Christian witness for the glory of God. When rooted in prayer, one can be assured they are keeping that balance.

It is important to include the Word of God in our Lenten practices. In Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter, "Aperuit illis" - instituting the Sunday of the Word of God - he reminds the faithful, "God's Word constantly reminds us of the merciful love of the Father Who calls his children to live in love. The life of Jesus is the full and perfect expression of this Divine love, which holds nothing back but offers itself to all without reserve."

Also included in these chapter 6 verses of Matthew's Gospel is The Lord's Prayer. The early Church theologian Origen called The Lord's Prayer, "a summary of the whole gospel" (De Oratione). In this prayer, we ask the Lord to forgive us our trespasses. Lent is an excellent time to take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession: the Church's great Sacrament of penance, healing and forgiveness. Lent is the perfect opportunity for Catholics to make their required minimum yearly Confession.

Lent reminds us that we are all called to a life of holiness. The universal call to holiness should move each of us to commit to a faith well lived. In a desire to imitate Christ, the good of our actions should be to the benefit of others and to pleasing God over all other motives.

Families may wish to use these 40 days to grow in faith together; working together for the good of others, coming together in prayer, and supporting each other on the days of fast. Families can work together especially here in the Fall River diocese through many volunteer opportunities.

Families can also come together in prayer, perhaps in a pilgrimage to the newly created Museum of Family Prayer that we are blessed to have located within our diocese. Holy Cross Family Ministries, which continues the work of Venerable Patrick Peyton, has created a beautiful experience where families can come together to not only learn about prayer, but more importantly, spend time in prayer together. Father Peyton was known for two quotes that are particularly poignant to the faithful as we begin this Lenten season: "The family that prays together stays together" and "A world at prayer is a world at peace."

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Like prayer and almsgiving, Jesus teaches His followers to fast not for others to see and exalt, but to give glory to God. In addition to the mandatory days of Lenten fasting, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, the faithful can use these 40 days to offer personal fasts as penance and prayer. While food may be what is typically associated with fasting, there are many other ways to sacrifice. Opening time in your schedule, offering extra time to bless others through prayer, study of the faith, or volunteering.

My prayer and my wish for all of us this Lent is to spend time in prayer and service to benefit the good of our Church without the concern for self. That each would seek a deeper conversion through conversation with the Lord in prayer, through the Scriptures, and participation in the Sacraments. May the beauty, mystery, and grace of the Catholic faith we are so blessed to profess, be more clearly evident to you this Lent than ever before.

+Edgar M. da Cunha

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