

2020 Archbishop's Lenten Message

Dear People of the Archdiocese of St. John's,

This Sunday's scripture readings speak to us of our call as Christians to be people who are loving and holy. In the first reading, the Lord speaking through Moses says: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy." In the second reading, Paul writing to the Corinthians asks them: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" And in today's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

This coming Wednesday we will begin the liturgical season of Lent, a season in which we, as followers of Christ, are especially invited to redouble our efforts to be holy, to be living temples of God's presence, and to strive for perfection in living the faith that we profess.

Traditionally, our Lenten efforts involve prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These three activities complement and support one another. With prayer, we open ourselves to the Lord's wisdom and guidance, allowing Him to enlighten us as to His will and accepting from Him the fortitude needed to be faithful in carrying out His will. Through fasting we deny ourselves not only those things which are sinful but also those "lesser goods" that, although not sinful or bad in or of themselves, hinder us from achieving/carrying out those "greater goods" that the Lord so desires for us. By almsgiving, we share the fruit of our prayer and fasting, gifting to God and others those treasures discovered in prayer and made available through fasting.

In this year's Lenten message, Pope Francis notes that: "Prayer can take any number of different forms, but what truly matters in God's eyes is that it penetrates deep within us and chips away at our hardness of heart, in order to convert us ever more fully to God and to his will." Regarding almsgiving Pope Francis writes: "Today too, there is a need to appeal to men and women of good will to share, by almsgiving, their goods with those most in need, as a means of personally participating in the building of a better world. Charitable giving makes us more human, whereas hoarding risks making us less human, imprisoned by our own selfishness." As Canadian Catholics, we are especially invited to give alms through the Share Lent Collection that is taken up on the fifth Sunday of Lent.

I had a professor in the seminary who assured us that, if we prepared for Lent well opening ourselves to God's inspiration in discerning His will and then faithfully strove to carry out our Lenten resolutions, come Easter, God would give us a gift. This "gift" would be the fruit of our prayer, fasting and almsgiving and would make us holier, a better temple of the Holy Spirit and a little closer to being "perfect" like our heavenly Father.

Asking that you join with me in praying for God's guidance in preparing for the coming Lenten season and for God's grace in living a good and holy lent, I remain,

Yours in Christ,

+Peter Hundt
Archbishop of St. John's, NL