



BISHOP'S PASTORAL LETTER FOR LENT

The following letter will be read at Masses of obligation on March 3-4:

My dear People,

On Wednesday of this week we will receive the ashes on our foreheads. Acceptance of the ashes is a commitment to what Lent stands for. And what does Lent stand for? Above all else, it calls us to conversion. It invites us, not simply to abstain from certain things, not simply to engage in certain projects, but to undergo a radical change of heart — a change in our way of thinking and acting.

The conversion to which Lent calls us forces us to face up to the reality of sin in our lives. One of the difficulties of our past attitude toward sin was that we tended to see sin only in isolated actions. We were almost morbidly concerned about particular sinful actions; at the same time we were inclined to ignore attitudes of heart and mind that breed sin. Sin may find its expression in individual actions, but it finds its source in the minds and hearts of men. So often when we go to confession we express our sorrow for isolated sinful actions; but we tend to be quite oblivious to the self-centeredness, the self-seeking, the selfishness that is at the root of our sinful actions.

The message of the Gospel is that Jesus came to deliver us, not so much from our sinful actions as from our sinfulness. That is why the Gospel's call to conversion is not

simply or even primarily a call to repentance for this or that particular transgression. Rather, it is a call to restructure our values, to remake our hearts, to accept the priorities of the Gospel.

This change of heart affects the multiple relationships in which man finds himself. It requires of us a profound rethinking of our lives — a rethinking that will manifest itself in the attitudes we take towards others. The disciple of Christ is taught to pray: forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us. The forgiveness that God offers us cannot be isolated from our daily life and the daily relationships that make up that life. We cannot hope for God's love and mercy, if we close our hearts to the problems of our neighbor and the problems of the world in which we live.

Lent, then, is a time of conversion, of heart-changing. It is a time to break down the barriers that separate us from one another — in the family, in society, in the Church. It is a time to uproot the prejudices — conscious or not — which prevent us from truly seeing all men as our brothers in Christ. Lent is a time to realize that we cannot exclude anyone from the community of love and concern.

One of the important ways in which we express and deepen our commitment to the kind of conversion that the Gospel calls us to is through our participation in the wor-

ship of the Church. May I invite all of you to daily Mass during Lent and to full participation in the liturgical programs planned for this Lent in your parish.

In this year of diocesan renewal it is imperative that we give special attention to the renewal of our worship of God. The Second Vatican Council tells us that "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all her powers flow."

We urge all our people to give serious thought to the importance of the Church's liturgy in their lives. We urge priests as liturgical leaders and parish worship committees to give serious thought and expend untiring efforts to create good liturgical celebrations in their parishes. Good celebrations will foster the goals of Lent; poor celebrations will impede them.

Wishing you all the blessings of this Holy Season, I remain

Devotedly your in Christ,

Bishop Begins Lenten Series

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan begins today a series of Lenten meditations that will conclude April 18 with an Easter message of hope and promise.

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