

The Acceptable Time — NOW

Today generally arrives as a sudden surprise and an unwelcome one. Another Lent is upon us — a season that will never be selected by the vast majority of humanity to win a popularity prize. For the human temptation is to push discipline into a remote tomorrow.



The desert of Lent presents stark beauty with searing heat in the day and penetrating cold at night and a dependence on slim resources. Its promises are to most of us questionable values — silence, self-understanding, personal purification. For we spend our days in a world that is bountiful, gratifying, distracting, noisy and seemingly beautiful.

Yet, the Lord has assured us of a 'now' that is an acceptable time to experience the joy that comes to us only through the pain of discipleship. Because of the gravitational pull of earth to follow the path of least resistance we would beg for a tomorrow and more time for our decision.

Lent calls us to painful conversion — to undergo a radical change of heart. This conversion forces us to face up to the reality of our sinfulness. 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.

Special emphasis will be given this Lent throughout the Diocese to the Sacrament of conversion and reconciliation. I want it to be in every parish a period of instruction in preparation for the Easter promulgation of the New Rite of Penance.

Our program of fasting which has always been a part of the observance of Lent is given special direction this Lent in a program called Operation Rice Bowl. The 41st International Eucharistic Congress Committee is promoting this project to sensitize us to the physical hunger that is the daily suffering of a large part of our human family. American families of every faith are being asked to offer a special prayer for the starving each Wednesday during Lent and Passover. Families are urged to eat on these days a sacrificial meal. Each participating family will place the money saved in a special cardboard rice bowl that will be taken to the church or synagogue on Sunday or the Sabbath. Every Catholic diocese in the country will be assigned a district in the Third World by Catholic Relief Services. Seventy per cent of the contributions will be used to help starving people and to develop food programs in the Third World. Thirty per cent will be used locally.

By denying ourselves we can say to the poor of the world: "We can never be poor as you are poor (we belong to the affluent minority), but by our self-denial we can at least stand with you and even discover the poverties that afflict us (the poverty of our spirit, the poverty of our insight, the poverty of our love) and come to the realization that we are all one people — all of us in need of liberation." Self-denial is our way of discovering the poor and including them in our world and ourselves in theirs.

As one American pastor who has seen firsthand the suffering of the starving in India recently remarked: "If the Bread of Christ does not move us to share our daily bread, it is a meaningless gesture."

I hope that the 'now' that is the Lent of 1976 will have deep significance for all of us and will help you and me to become freed from the things that enslave our spirit.

'Your Sorrow Shall Be Turned into Joy'

Following is the talk of Pope Paul VI at the Feb. 11 General Audience at Vatican City.

Yes, beloved Brothers and Sons, after the celebration of the Holy Year we must imprint on our spirit that sense, which corresponds precisely to the mystery of grace, of the new relationship established for us Christians, or rather we should say, re-established, restored, operating, of God-Love at the heart of our existence, the sense of newness of Christian newness. The Christian is always a new man. He is always a young man. He must feel reborn, continually reborn! He must feel that he is continually in a phase of overcoming the frail and

depressed condition of purely natural life in the act of straining towards, and in fact reaching, in a certain way, a state of supra-natural life. And this must be accompanied by some corresponding interior, subjective experience, which must also be exterior in the Church, of the atmosphere of love and charity to which he, as a Christian, has been admitted.

Those who know and feel that they have obtained this new animation, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, that they are, as is said, in the grace of God, should nourish in themselves the consciousness of this inestimable fortune obtained, and give their style of life this note of newness and happiness. St. Paul speaks to us of this repeatedly, exhorting us "to walk in newness of life." It is he who speaks to us of our "old self", such as we are when Christ does not live in us and who introduces us to the mystical doctrine, accessible to every Christian, of Christ's life

which is realized in us, affirming: "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me." This psychology of becoming "Christians" in the mysterious but realistic sense of the word, is characteristic of the "saints", as the Christians described themselves from the first days of the Church, of the adopted sons of God, participating to a certain degree at present, and potentially in a further fullness of divine Life. It is expressed in a joyful optimism, which pervades our new life in every facet of its existence (we spoke of this in our Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete in Domino last year), and which assures us in faith and in hope of the victorious fullness of charity beyond the grave.

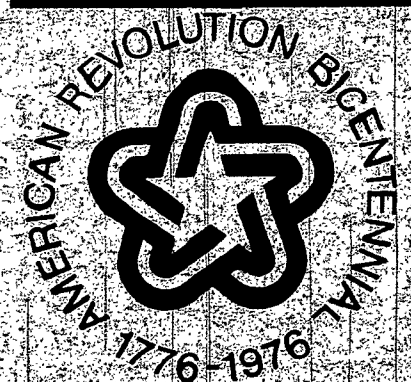
Our present life assumes such an ineffable, beautiful and already beatifying appearance when viewed in the eschatological light of future life. What changes in the philosophy of existence, when the supernatural order of grace is infused into it? Nothing, it would be said, if we judge things with the criterion of sense experience and of the rational order alone. But just as when a light is lit in a dark room, nothing changes in itself, but everything acquires order, dimensions and meaning, so in our earthly existence nothing seems to be changed when the living mystery of Christ is introduced into it. But actually everything, on the contrary, is defined in its true reality, which is moreover a developing, changeable and short-lived reality, on the part of the man endowed with it, but enriched with a potentiality of being revived, of miraculous resurrection.

But let us pay attention, beloved Brothers. Let us not think that this alone is everything; let us not believe that now everything is rejoicing for us. If we wish to inaugurate anew and promote the "civilization of love", we must not delude ourselves that it is possible to change

these years enclosed within the banks of time, into a river of perfect happiness. The Lord does give us now, it is true, the newness of grace and therefore of his joy, but not the glory, not that perfect measure of experience of Him, reserved for after the last day, at the mouth of the river of time, when "we shall be like to him, for we shall see him just as he is." "We see now, as St. Paul writes, through a mirror in an obscure manner, but then face to face."

Why do we draw attention to this distance of time and of view from the attainment of the true and perfect form of Christian life assigned to us? Oh! You know why! Not that this must disturb our confidence and our anticipated and hoped for joy. The reason is the Cross, erected on the highest point on the path between the present and the future life. The Cross is not only a part, but constitutes the center, of the mystery of love, which we have chosen as the true and complete program of our renewed existence. Amen, amen, I say to you, Christ taught at the end of the Last Supper, that you shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and you shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. He had already said: "He who loves his life, loses it; and he who hates his life in this world, keeps it into life everlasting."

This fixed memory will strengthen us in this present and earthly adventure not to be afraid, but to be strong; not fickle, but consistent; not satisfied with the false rewards of the world, but eager for the Kingdom of God. We must not be afraid of finding ourselves, one day, perhaps, in a minority, if we are faithful. We must not be embarrassed by unpopularity, if we are consistent. We must not care about being defeated, if we are witnesses to truth and to the freedom of the sons of God. May God help us all in this way: with our Apostolic Blessing.



Your Heritage

March 4, 1805: St. Elizabeth Bayley Seton is received into the Catholic Church. Elizabeth Bayley was the daughter of a prominent New York physician, a member of the Episcopal

Church. She grew up to be a devout young woman, dedicating much time to the care of the poor. In 1794 she married William Magee Seton in a very stylish marriage. She bore him five children. Seriously ill by 1803, Seton, with his family, sought health in Italy, but he died there soon after arrival. Elizabeth, bereaved, first experienced in Leghorn the

consolations of Catholicism. On her return, she decided to become a Catholic. To support her family, she opened a school; but the prejudice of her former friends forced her to give up. In 1807, Sulpician Father William DeBourg invited her to found a school in Maryland. On June 2, 1809, she and a few other women established what became the American Sisters of

Charity. From her center, Emmitsburg, Maryland, she laid the foundations of the American Catholic parochial school system. Pope John XXIII declared her "blessed" on March 17, 1963; and on Sept. 14, 1975, Pope Paul VI canonized her — the first native American citizen to merit the official title "saint." — Rochester Diocesan Bicentennial Commission.