



Lenten Message 2022

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We may wonder, is joy possible during a season of penance? The answer is a resounding yes! Pope Francis reminds us that, “joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved” (Evangelii Gaudium, par. 6). Recalling that Lent means new springtime and renewal, we are encouraged to dive deeply into the infinite love of God through acts of penance, which help to rid us of the effects of sin in our lives and bind us closer to one another in charity, so as to experience fullness of joy in God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “the interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others” (CCC 1434). During this privileged season we look inwards to rid ourselves of all that prevents us from receiving Christ’s love and take up practices that will help us grow closer to him. It is a time of purification and of self-denial, of giving up in order to receive more of the love and freedom we are made for in Jesus.

St. François de Sales tells us that “the principle means of union with God must be found in the reception of the Sacraments and in prayer.” Lent affords the opportunity to make prayer a greater priority, acknowledging the ways in which we have allowed other things to displace Jesus and to put him once more at the centre of our lives. It is a time when individuals and families choose to take on new practices of prayer, such as a daily Examen (see <https://priestlyformation.org/resources/fr.-timothy-gallagher/the-examen-prayer.html>), Lectio Divina (<https://www.usccb.org/bible/national-bible-week/upload/lectio-divina.pdf>) or Ignatian Prayer (<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/ignatian-contemplation-imaginative-prayer/?amp>), all of which can breathe new life into our prayer regimen as we ponder God’s word in the Scriptures more deeply. Many parishes offer additional times for Mass, Reconciliation, and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament during the season of Lent as powerful ways to grow closer to Jesus in the Sacraments. Faithful are encouraged to consult their parishes and make use of these times to commune more deeply with Jesus.

We are pleased to be offering a diocesan Revitalization Series for Lent on Tuesday evenings following the 5:30 p.m. Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. In addition to the regularly scheduled time of Eucharistic Adoration in the afternoon between the noon and 5:30 p.m. Masses, the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed for Adoration from 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. During this time priests of the Saint John region will be available to celebrate the Sacrament of

Reconciliation. The diocesan rosary which takes place at 7:00 pm on Tuesdays via Facebook live will be streamed from the Cathedral, followed by a teaching on the theme of prayer to assist us in going deeper in our relationship with the Lord. Some quiet reflection with intermittent worship will take place throughout. I pray that this will be a time of personal encounter with Jesus and deep renewal, as we bring our diocesan needs, including our Cathedral restoration, before him in the Blessed Sacrament.

Fasting is a means of self-denial, depriving us of something good to make more room for Jesus in our lives, and become more aware of the needs of others. More than simply going without, fasting offered as prayer is a powerful means of uniting ourselves to Christ, who gave up so much for us. For those between the ages of 18 and 59 who are not prevented by poor health, the Universal Law of the Church calls us to observe days of fasting and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (abstinence from meat; only one full meal, plus two others sufficient to maintain strength on these days). Additional acts of self-denial are also encouraged to help us grow in self discipline and turn our thoughts to Jesus and our loved ones, for whom our fasting may be offered as a prayer.

Almsgiving, which the Catechism refers to as “a witness to fraternal charity” and “a work of justice pleasing to God”, can be described as the donation of money or goods and works of charity to benefit others. The Holy Father tells us that “Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be a missionary. This openness of the heart is a source of joy, since ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35)” (Evangeliu Gaudium, par. 272). Our greatest vocation is to love God and to love our neighbor. Let us use this grace-filled time to reach out to our neighbors in charity, especially the lonely and the isolated, to bear witness to Jesus and his love for them.

In his homily for Ash Wednesday in 2021, Pope Francis said, “in this life, we will always have things to do and excuses to offer, but right now, brothers and sisters, right now is the time to return to God.” Let us return to Jesus with new vigour and purpose, growing closer to him in our acts of penance so as to experience the fullness of joy he promises. May we rid ourselves of all that prevents us from living a truly fulfilled life and give God permission to move in our hearts, drawing us ever closer to himself and the new life he has won for us through his Resurrection.

Sincerely yours in Jesus with Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christian Riesbeck".

✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

February 28, 2022