



February 22, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we begin on Ash Wednesday our annual Lenten pilgrimage, that “itinerary of more intense spiritual training” (cf. *Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for Lent 2009*), we invite Saint Paul, during this Jubilee Year dedicated to him, to accompany us as our teacher and guide. Indeed, Saint Paul urges us: “...we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain...Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6: 1-2). The “now” of which he speaks is the season of Lent.

Saint Paul also points to prayer, fasting and almsgiving, reminding us to incorporate these three principal works of Lent into our daily living as we seek to “turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel” (cf. Liturgy for Ash Wednesday) throughout the forty days of our Lenten pilgrimage towards Easter. Moreover, in his *Message for Lent 2009*, Our Holy Father focuses his “reflections especially on the value and meaning of fasting.”

We find ourselves this Lent in the midst of an economic situation the likes of which we have not experienced since the 1930s. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in his reflections on fasting that “voluntary fasting enables us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who bends low and goes to the help of his suffering brother” (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 15). Through fasting or other similar acts of self-denial, we would then have more resources to share with those in greater need than ourselves. Imagine, for example, what would happen if we gave up buying lunch and instead brought from home a more simple fare. The money saved could help feed those who are truly experiencing deprivation of one kind or another. Each one of us can find specific ways by which to practice the self-denial of fasting, which then leads to the life-giving support of almsgiving, deeds of mercy.

Yes, the purpose of our annual Lenten pilgrimage and retreat is to unite us more closely to God and, through Him, with one another. What separates us is sin, our freely-willed lack of love for God, others and ourselves, expressed in a variety of ways. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came precisely for the forgiveness of sins and that forgiveness we experience in a most personal and real way when we are reconciled to Christ and to the Church in the Sacrament of Penance. There, through the instrumentality of the ordained priest, who represents both Christ and the Church, both of whom have been offended by our sins, and who has been given power by Christ to forgive sin (cf. John 20: 22-23), we encounter Divine Mercy and are truly forgiven.

I urge every member of our diocesan family to receive the Sacrament of Penance during our Lenten pilgrimage. A complete list of Confession schedules, the Act of Contrition, Examinations of Conscience and resources including the Holy Father’s Lenten Message for 2009, can be found at [www.arlingtondiocese.org](http://www.arlingtondiocese.org). I especially encourage anyone who has not received this sacrament in a long time to come back home to Jesus and to the Community of His Disciples, the Church. Do not be afraid! We have been waiting for you to return home. As we are told in the Scriptures, “Come back to me with all your heart” (Joel 2:12).

With Saint Paul as our teacher and guide, let us journey together through Lent: praying, fasting, giving alms and experiencing God’s reconciling love in the Sacrament of Penance. “May every family and Christian community use well this time of Lent, therefore, to cast aside all that distracts the spirit and grow in whatever nourishes the soul, moving it to love of God and neighbor” (cf. *Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for Lent 2009*).

I join you on our Lenten pilgrimage with prayer, fasting, almsgiving, receiving the Sacrament of Penance and asking Saint Paul’s intercession.

Faithfully in Christ,

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde  
Bishop of Arlington