



ARCHBISHOP'S MESSAGE

February 12, 2021

Lenten Message 2021

The Church celebrates the Holy Season of Lent to prepare ourselves for the Easter Mystery. The structure of this holy season with its particular liturgical celebrations, such as Ash Wednesday, the Scrutinies for those seeking entrance to the Church through baptism at Easter, Palm Sunday and the Holy Week liturgies are meaningful and familiar. Though Lent may continue in a predictable pattern, circumstances in the world change from year to year. Each Lent, though familiar, is unique because we are experiencing life differently this year than the preceding one.

Last year we were in our first pandemic lockdown for Lent and Easter. For many, the loss of our Lenten liturgies and the powerful Easter celebration was particularly hard. We do not know at the present time how our Lent and Easter will unfold this year. There are contingency plans for different scenarios but much remains uncertain. What is certain, however, is our traditional Lenten preparations of prayer, fasting and charity, which serve as a preparation for Easter in this holy season of repentance and a means of renewed commitment to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

This year, Lent will be different than our usual experience. I encourage each and everyone of us to rely on our traditional practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving with renewed vigour this Lent. You may consider offering the fruits of these practices in ways that support those struggling in the pandemic, especially those who are most vulnerable due to age, health, lack of resources or other reasons. No matter our particular circumstance, we can pray with and for those in need and in our fasting and charity, perhaps we can find ways to use the fruits of those practices to lend a material hand to those who need it.

Pope Francis in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, writes: “life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter. I have frequently called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions” (n.215). I had a meeting with Carl Nicholson, the head of the Catholic Centre for Immigration. Carl shared with me the history of CCI’s origins in Ottawa and the foundational support from the Filles de la Sagesse and the Soeurs de la Charité without whom CCI would not exist. Today, CCI in its three locations, welcomes and supports refugees and other newcomers to Canada, helping them settle in our beautiful city. CCI supports newcomers through, to mention on a few examples, mentorship

programs, assistance getting accreditation with professional bodies, help finding housing and work, aid in accessing health care as well finding the spiritual support they need. CCI is an example of the Christian practice of welcoming the stranger and caring for those in need, creating those places of encounter between people of which Pope Francis so often speaks. It is beyond the scope of this Lenten message to catalogue all the ways CCI helps those in need: I encourage you to see for yourself at: <http://cciottawa.ca/>. Carl shared with me that many of the hundreds of volunteers come from our Catholic parishes and this is a powerful witness. When it is possible, you might consider helping where you can, to welcome and assist new comers to our city.

Ash Wednesday Liturgy Clarifications

As you have heard, we will be able to have larger celebrations of Ash Wednesday in our churches with up to 30% of the church's normal capacity providing physical distancing and the other measures we have in place are followed.

For the distribution of ashes, I would like to mention that the sprinkling of ashes on people's head is the preferred form. It is permissible to use a cotton swab or Q-tip to impose ashes on the recipient's forehead as long as you use a fresh swab or Q-tip for each person.

Please continue to pray for me, as I do for you.

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