



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO
Office of the Bishop

February 14, 2021
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lent 2021: A time of Healing and of Hope

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

May the grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

On this Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, and on the day when the world celebrates St. Valentine's Day, a day to rejoice in those with whom we share a special bond of human love, I write this letter with the love of Christ in my heart for all of you, and to encourage our Diocese to prepare our hearts for the Season of Lent which begins on Wednesday, February 17, 2021.

As we all know, Lent is the annual period of 40 days which, as we will hear St. Paul remind us on Ash Wednesday in the Second Reading, provides us with "a very acceptable time to return to the Lord." (2 Cor.5:20-6:2) Sin is what turns us away from the Lord in our daily lives, in both small ways and sometimes major ways. Lent gives us a chance to refocus our attention on our relationship with God, and one another. This penitential season also gives us an opportunity to determine the answers to two questions: what do I need to do to strengthen both my relationship with God, and with those with whom I share life in this world? How do I need to do that?

The ancient spiritual practices, or three pillars of Lent, of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving/acts of charity are the ways that faith-filled people "return to the Lord". During the Season of Lent, every member of the Faithful is encouraged to make "Lenten resolutions"---practices of special prayer, particular fasting, or other acts of charity---to help each person be more mindful of our relationship with God that needs to be strengthened. However, there are also acts of penance that the Church requires of all of us. **Even though the General Dispensation from the Obligation to attend Sunday Mass each week in person is still in effect, that Dispensation does not apply to the Lenten Penances.** Therefore, I remind you that Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (April 2, 2021) are days of fast and abstinence for those to whom it applies, and the Fridays of Lent are to be meatless, again for those to whom it applies. (see our [diocesan website](#) for Lenten regulation information).

Over and above those minimal Lenten fasting requirements, Lent 2021 provides us with a particular opportunity to pray for *healing* from the COVID-19 pandemic scourging the world, as well as the great divisions that are afflicting our society; and to ask God's grace to help us renew our *hope* in God's promises of unconditional love and His abiding Presence with us.

During Lent, we are challenged to examine, and to work to overcome, all our bad habits, our moral weaknesses, our self-centeredness, and all our attitudes of mind and heart that prevent us from speaking words of reassurance to our suffering brothers and sisters. As we reflect on God's Word during this Season of Lent, we are invited to look deeper into our hearts, asking the Holy Spirit:

Come in, ignite my heart. Reveal to me what my real problems are. What are the things that lead me to commit sins of indifference, to neglect my fraternal responsibilities? What are the attitudes that cause me to abuse or neglect those who are most in need of my help? Where do I need mercy most? Where do I need healing? How can I live more confidently in the Hope of the Resurrection to which Lent leads us at Easter?

Dear Family of Faith, every Lent is a grace-filled opportunity. I firmly believe that Lent 2021 is a critically important time for each of us to focus more deeply on our primary relationship with God and neighbor. Let us ask God to **heal us** from any of our sins that have caused us to turn away from Him, as well as the commitment to refocus our view of life, both on the Joy of Easter Sunday, and on the **Hope of Easter** that always draws us forward throughout our Journey of Faith in this world.

Assuring you of my heartfelt prayers, and asking for your prayers for me as well, I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo