



Lenten Message 2021

Dear faithful,

As Lent begins, we are mindful of all we have had to give up over this past year. It has been a year like no other, one that has tested us in every way. Preparing our hearts to enter this season of penance we may well ask ourselves, can anything new be born of this moment?

Lent is a season of hope – it means new springtime, renewal. We need hope now more than ever to help us face the challenges of these days. During Lent we may be tempted to focus on the negative – on all we have had to give up – but that is not the aim. We do penance to bring about our conversion. In recognizing our sinfulness, we are reminded that Jesus died for us while we were still sinners to give us the promise of everlasting life! (see Romans 5:8) Lent is therefore a time to give God permission to help us turn away from the things that prevent us from living a truly fulfilled life and embrace the victory Jesus has won for us. It is his promise of new life to us.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that, “every sincere act of worship or devotion promotes penance by reviving the spirit of conversion and repentance within us and contributes to the forgiveness of sins.” (CCC 1437) We make penance through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In our observance of Lent it is important to remember the idea is not simply to give up one or two things, but to be filled up with Jesus who makes all things new.

With this as the starting point we may choose to do things that will help us stay closer to Jesus throughout the day. Increasing our commitment to the sacraments by attending Mass during the week or going to confession more frequently is an excellent beginning, because it puts us in direct contact with God’s grace. Making a regular Holy Hour, praying the rosary, praying together as a family, and reading scripture, participating in a virtual retreat or stations/way of the cross, or any number of devotions that can be taken up with consistency during these 40 days will help to orient our hearts to the Lord.

As we continue to find ourselves living amid a pandemic, there are no shortage of opportunities for almsgiving. I encourage you to be aware of your neighbors in a particular way this Lent, to reach out to those who are isolated and in need of companionship offering help and support, a kind word, or a good deed. Our greatest vocation is to love God and to love our neighbor, and in this way, we become signs of the new springtime Christ has promised.

In this year of Saint Joseph, we look especially to our spiritual father, and may use Lent as a time to grow closer to him. Those of us wishing to make a consecration to Saint Joseph may choose to begin on February 15, to be consecrated on the Solemnity of Saint Joseph (March 19). Visit our website for additional resources (<https://dioceseofsaintjohn.org/year-of-saint-joseph>).

In his homily for Ash Wednesday last year, Pope Francis said that Lent is a time “for recognizing that our lowly ashes are loved by God. It is a time of grace, a time for letting God gaze upon us with love and in this way change our lives. We were put in this world to go from ashes to life.” With full confidence let us journey towards Easter, conversion, and the hope of the Resurrection.

Sincerely yours in Jesus with Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christian Riesbeck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "C" and a long, sweeping tail.

✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

February 11, 2021