



Archbishop's Lenten Letter 2016

TO GROW IN MERCY THIS LENT

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Lent is about my call as a disciple of Jesus to renew my dying to sin and rising to newness of life with Christ that took place when I was baptized.

We Catholics do this as we accompany, in prayer and with other gestures of support the “Elect”, who will celebrate the Sacraments of Christian Initiation at the Easter Vigil.

As Lent approaches you may, like me, wonder how to develop that relationship with Jesus. Particularly in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, I ponder how to “be merciful just as your heavenly Father is merciful” (Luke 6.36).

Of course, we do have some practices in common to help in this process.

The Church asks me to fast on Ash Wednesday, to mark the beginning of my pilgrimage with Christ. And also on Good Friday, in gratitude for Jesus’ death on the Cross that, out of God’s merciful love, took away my sins. To remind me of this each week, the Church asks me to abstain from meat on the other Fridays of Lent.

I am encouraged to make sacrifices—of my own choosing—on the weekdays of Lent. When I cut back on food or other legitimate pleasures, I can give the money I save to the poor, showing them mercy as some of my fellow Catholics are doing to support refugee families.

On Solidarity Sunday—March 13—I can make a sacrificial offering to assist the poor countries of the world through “Development and Peace”, Canada’s member in the worldwide Caritas network of Catholic aid agencies.

A traditional act of Lenten piety is to make a good confession, to experience God's mercy and forgiveness. Our priests want to share this grace with the faithful, particularly on the Day of Confessions that will be held in a number of our parish churches. Extended hours for the Sacrament of Reconciliation will take place on Friday, March 4.

To grow in merciful compassion as Pope Francis encourages us, I invite you, dear brothers and sisters, to join with me in carrying out one of the corporal or spiritual works of mercy, such as visiting the elderly in hospital or a nursing home.

Finally, I encourage you to read as I will in Lent, the message of merciful compassion that we find in the Gospel of Luke. A good way to begin is to focus on the gospel readings for each Sunday that are taken from Luke's gospel. As we meditate on a passage from Scripture day by day, we can more and more identify with the compassionate heart of Jesus and his merciful gaze on those in need.

I wish you all an experience of God's mercy that you can pass on to others. Please pray for me as I do for you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Terrence Prendergast, S.J." with a stylized flourish at the end.

✠ Terrence Prendergast, S.J.
Archbishop of Ottawa