



# Pastoral Letter

Lent 2018

**« Fasting, Prayer and Almsgiving »**



(Jesus in the desert)

His Excellency Serge Poitras

Bishop of Timmins



Pastoral Letter *Fasting, Prayer and Almsgiving* (Mt 6: 1-18)

## LENT 2018

Every year the Church invites us to enter into Lent, this period of 40 days that prepares us to celebrate more deeply the mystery of the death and resurrection of Our Lord, to renew the promises of our Baptism and to live our faith in a more perfect way. The first Preface of Lent describes these aspects well:

*“For by your gracious gift each year your faithful await the sacred paschal feasts*

*With the joy of minds made pure,*

*So that, more eagerly intent on prayer and on the works of charity,*

*and participating in the mysteries*

*By which they have been reborn*

*They may be led to the fullness of grace that you bestow on your sons and daughters.”*

This liturgical season recalls the 40 years that the Hebrews spent in the desert, after their liberation from slavery in Egypt and before their entry into the Promised Land. In that time they received the commandments from God, basic requirements for those called to live as People of God, that is to say, as people belonging to God who had entered into a covenant with him: *“I will take you as my own people,”* declared the Lord, *“and I will be your God.”* (Ex 6: 7) The prophet Jeremiah expanded on the requirements of this covenant that had to be written on hearts:

*“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt...*

<sup>33</sup> *But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,*

*says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

<sup>34</sup> *No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” (Jer 31: 31-34).*

Immediately before his Baptism, Jesus, for his part, also spent 40 days in the desert (Mt 4: 2; Mk 1: 13; Lk 4: 1) to prepare himself for his saving mission.

## I – THE MEANING OF LENT



- 1- In this light, we are called to experience Lent as a more intense spiritual time, in the image of the person who wants to improve his or her physical condition: the person will look for a good trainer, who will propose an adapted program of varied exercises to strengthen muscle tone, a diet rich in such and such a vitamin. Specific goals will also be suggested as well as a regular check-up. The Church is our guide for improving our Christian life. She proposes certain spiritual exercises that enable us to become disciples more faithful to the Gospel, able to examine our conscience, to make the best choices and to correct what is defective.
- 2- The experience of Lent can also be inspired by the situation of someone who has health problems. A first step for that person is to consult a doctor who will identify the illness and prescribe resources to combat the illness: specific medications to be taken at that moment for a certain period of time, a change of regime (different food, supplementary physical exercises). After some time, an appointment will be made to check on the effects of the medication: blood test, evaluation of the medication (dosage, frequency); adjustments will be made. Under the direction of the Church, we too can identify the weaknesses of our Christian life and seek to remedy them.
- 3- We are invited to invest greater energy in Lent. Since I have been Bishop of Timmins, I have highlighted this liturgical season through my pastoral letters so that the faithful can benefit from Lent spiritually. In 2013, I offered some reflections on the need to enter into the *Understanding of Christ*; following that, I focussed on *Prayer* (2014), on *Conversion and the Sacrament of Reconciliation* (2015), on the *Eucharist* (2016). Last year (2017), I recalled that we are all called to holiness. In our project of being "*Faithful to the Teaching of the Apostles*" (Fall 2017), I dealt with the importance of being *disciples of the Lord* (n. 1-4) and of being inspired by his Wisdom in our lives. (n. 5-18), all while being aware that his message encounters resistance (persecution, seduction). Consequently, we are confronted with spiritual combat. (n. 19-24)
- 4- We are in fact called to spiritual health, that is to say, holiness, as I wrote last year at the same date. In his *Treatise on Christian Perfection*, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, offers us an excellent reflection on this subject that is reproduced in the *Liturgy of the Hours*:

*"Since, by goodness of God, we who are called 'Christians', have been granted the honour of sharing this name, the greatest, the highest, the most sublime of all names, it follows that each of the titles that express its meaning should be clearly reflected in us. If we are not to lie when we call ourselves 'Christians' we must bear witness to it by our way of living."* (Monday XII)

*What then must we do, we who have been found worthy of the name of Christ? Each of us must examine his thoughts, words and deeds, to see whether they are directed toward Christ or are turned away from him.*

*This examination is carried out in various ways. Our deeds or our thoughts or our words are not in harmony with Christ if they issue from passion. They then bear the mark of the enemy who smears the pearl of the*

*heart with the slime of passion, dimming and even destroying the lustre of the precious stone. On the other hand, if they are free from and untainted by every passionate inclination, they are directed toward Christ, the author and source of peace.*

*For the purity of Christ and the purity that is manifested in our hearts are identical. Christ's purity, however, is the fountainhead; ours has its source in him and flows out of him. Our life is stamped with the beauty of his thought."* (Tuesday XII)



#### 5- **Spiritual Application** :

- a. Since my Baptism, the water of the life of God has been poured into my soul. Is it still pure or contaminated, polluted? Does the precious stone of my soul still shine with the radiance of the presence of God?
- b. What makes me recognizable as a disciple of Christ? What makes me seen as someone who is in a covenant, a deep friendship with him?
- c. Meditate on Psalm 63 : *"O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you. Your steadfast love is better than life... My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me"*.
- d. Examine if my thoughts, my words, my actions come from Christ or are they directed by another passion.

- e. In my relationship with Christ,
  - Is my heart *burning* like the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus? (Lk 24: 32)
  - Or lukewarm, as Jesus found so regrettable in Revelation (3: 16)? In his Lenten 2018 Message, the Pope reflects on cold hearts: *"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold."*(Mt 24: 12)
  - Am I embarrassed, ashamed or do I blush for being a disciple of Jesus? (Lk 9: 26) *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel,"* Saint Paul says. (Rom 1: 16)
- f. Take advantage of Lent to affirm my desire to be closer to Christ, to be more like him, as Saint Paul says so that *"Christ lives in me."* (Gal 2: 20).
- g. Use the means for reflection available to me: the present pastoral letter, the Lenten Message of our Holy Father Pope Francis...

- 6- **O**ur spiritual health, our holiness is threatened by the virus of sin. Saint John invites us to recognize its presence within us: *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."*<sup>9</sup> *If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*<sup>10</sup> *If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1: 8-10)*
  
- 7- **H**ere is a teaching that does not please many people in our time. In fact, some people affirm that there is no more sin. However, evil is spreading its ravages in the world. One simply has to look at the news: every day brings us much suffering caused by human malice (egotism, lies, thefts, violence, exploitation, poverty...). It's easy to accuse others of the evil that happens but the Gospel invites us to look at ourselves, to do our own examination of conscience, to identify the evil that we are responsible for in our daily lives. Here we can be inspired by King David, who had the courage to acknowledge his responsibility for evil: *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight."* (Ps 51: 3-4)
  
- 8- **T**he prophet Isaiah uses an impressive image to describe the presence and influence of sin: *"We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."* (Is 64: 6) Our sins deprive us of true life, they make us dried up leaves that the wind carries away ... we become dead, unable to resist the influence of evil. We know how true this is. People become slaves to their sins, to the evil that gradually destroys them. Let's simply think about those overcome by drugs or alcohol. Their whole lives turn around these realities that little by little, destroy their very bodies, break up their relationships with others. These people are carried away by the wind of evil, unable to offer any resistance. The absence of God in the lives of many puts them at the mercy of these destructive forces.
  
- 9- **T**he Church teaches that we are all marked by original sin that makes us spiritually fragile. Its consequences, its legacy, are present in all of us. In fact, every human person,

with the exception of the Blessed Virgin who was preserved from sin at its very root through her Immaculate Conception, has been affected by the seven capital sins. “They are called “capital” because they engender other sins, other vices...” (Catechism, n. 1866 : *Compendium* n. 398.) They are the roots of evil in us. Saint Thomas Aquinas studied them in the *Summa Theologiae* (I. IIae, question 84). We know about the list that I recalled last year: (Lenten Letter 2017, n. 48) : *pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia*.



## 10- Spiritual Application.

- a. Know the capital sins: *Pride* (considering oneself the centre of the world and superior to others, closed to God, refusing to acknowledge his gifts); *Greed* (accumulating wealth for itself, not being open to the poverty of others, being unable to give); *Lust* (looking for sexual pleasure itself, outside of God’s plan); *Envy* (feeling sadness in the face of the happiness or possessions of others, seeking to claim them for oneself); *Gluttony* (eating and drinking excessively); *Anger* (having excesses in words or actions: insults, violence, murder); *Sloth* (demonstrating a inordinate love for rest, neglecting the responsibilities of one’s state in life, lacking energy or effort for spiritual well-being).
- b. See how a capital sin is the source of other sins: for example the love of drinking leads to lies to hide this weakness, destroys health, leads to injustice by depriving the family of needed resources; it can engender domestic violence, job loss, cause car accidents ...
- c. Identify the capital sin that seems to dominate me.
- d. In the example of the Blessed Virgin, against the pride that refuses God, ask for the fundamental grace of humility by meditating on the *Magnificat* : “*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.*” Mary acknowledges the great favours that have been bestowed on her; she especially recognizes their source, who is God. Like Mary, I can acknowledge the gifts that the Lord has given me, thank him for them with gratitude and use them for his glory and the salvation of the world.
- e. Meditate on the Pope’s words in his 2018 Lenten Message. He denounces ‘false prophets’: “*They can appear as “snake charmers”, who manipulate human emotions in order to enslave others and lead them where they would have them go. How many of God’s children are mesmerized by momentary pleasures, mistaking them for true happiness!*”



- f. Meditate on the words of Saint Augustine : *“Woe to you, if in loving creatures, you abandon the Creator! Do they seem beautiful? How much more beautiful is the one who made them! I make a comparison: Let us suppose that a man gives his fiancée a ring; if the woman prefers the ring to her fiancé, what kind of wife would she be?”* (Commentary on the First Letter of Saint John, cited in the *Magnificat* magazine, December 2017, p. 412-413).
- g. Like King Solomon, ask God for the wisdom to guide my life correctly: *“Give me the wisdom that sits by your throne... that she may labour at my side... and that I may learn what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions.”* (Wisdom 9: 4. 10-11)
- h. Recognize the need for spiritual training: spiritual direction, spiritual readings, teaching...
- i. Recognize the need for a periodical examination: the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In his 2018 Lenten Message, the Pope writes: *“Again this year, the “24 Hours for the Lord” initiative, invites the entire Church community to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation in the context of Eucharistic adoration. In 2018, inspired by the words of Psalm 130:4, “With you is forgiveness”, this will take place from Friday, 9 March to Saturday, 10 March. In each diocese, at least one church will remain open for twenty-four consecutive hours, offering an opportunity for both Eucharistic adoration and sacramental confession.”*
- j. Use the spiritual ways that the Church recommends: fasting, praying and almsgiving.

## II – THREE WAYS TO EXPERIENCE LENT: FASTING, PRAYING, ALMSGIVING

11- **N**ow I wish to offer a few reflections on these three ways that the Church proposes to us for Lent: *fasting, praying and almsgiving*. We find them mentioned in the Opening Prayer of the Mass of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent as well as in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: *“The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, (Tb 12:8; Mt 6:1-18) which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others.”* (n. 1434) In this way, the Church goes back to the teaching of Jesus (Mt 6: 1-18), proclaimed on Ash Wednesday as the program for Lent that is beginning.



12- **L**et us take the time to be challenged by this Gospel passage: (Mt 6: 1-6. 16-18) :

*“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for*

*then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

<sup>2</sup> *"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

<sup>5</sup> *"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in*

*secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>7</sup> "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him...*

<sup>16</sup> *"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.»*

### 13- Spiritual Application

- a. Rediscover that the three ways proposed by the Church (fasting, praying, and almsgiving) go back to Jesus in person, from whom comes their great importance.
- b. As the *Catechism* says, practicing all three of them ... *"conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others."*
- c. Enter into the mind of Jesus: don't look for extraordinary feats, reported in the media: experience the three ways concretely, in the presence of God, in secret, discreetly.



III

### - FASTING

14- **E**ating is a basic need for the human being: in fact, no one can live without eating. Some people do not have the food they need; their whole life is spent looking for it; they cannot develop fully. In rich countries, the abundance of food poses a problem: some people eat too much, which engenders health problems such as dependence on food, overconsumption, morbid obesity ...



15- **Fasting is a voluntary act** that consists of moderating food, depriving oneself of it: the poor do not eat, even for a short time. It is not simply about not eating: the poor person does not eat ... this is an indisputable fact. Fasting assumes voluntary motivations. Thus, some people fast for aesthetic reasons : they adopt a slim diet in order to have a 'figure' that conforms to 'fashion standards'. Others don't eat for psychological reasons: this is the case for people afflicted with anorexia. Still others fast for ascetic reasons, thereby demonstrating the strength of their will, their capacity for personal control.

16- **The** fact of mastering our hunger, of moderating our appetite is obviously the expression of personal control ... not allowing ourselves to be dominated by the needs of the body. By fasting, we demonstrate certain strength in the face of the need to eat. Since the human being is not a pure spirit, his soul needs to express itself through acts and attitudes of the body.

17- **So** that it is experienced in a Christian manner, fasting should have spiritual motivations. In the Old Testament we see people fasting on special occasions: Queen Esther (Esther 4: 16) asks God for the grace to change the heart of the King whose decree was exterminating her people; Ahab fasts to implore God for forgiveness of his mistake (1 Kings 21, 27); the prophet Daniel fasts to obtain the light of God (Daniel 10: 3. 12).



18- **In** the New Testament we note that the disciples of John the Baptist fast (Mk 2: 18); the Pharisees also fast twice a week (Lk 18: 12). Saint Paul fasts to obtain the grace necessary for a mission (Acts 13: 2s; 2 Cor 6: 5; 11, 27). Jesus himself fasts 40 days in the desert (Mt 4: 2); he invites his disciples to fast, but in secret (Mt 6: 17s). We must be wary of the dangers of ostentation (being seen by others : Mt 6: 16), of formality, of pride as in the parable told by Saint Luke about the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk 18: 12).

19- **Nonetheless**, it is not because fasting can be turned off course or contaminated that we should renounce it. The example of Christ and the teaching of the Church is enough to remind us of the need, the value and the way to experience it in truth.

- a- The fact of voluntarily experimenting with hunger enables us to feel this hunger in our bodies that other humans feel by necessity: in this way we learn to be in solidarity with other humans. Aware of this solidarity, some people give in alms the equivalent amount that they would have spent to eat.

b- In the *Our Father*, Jesus taught us to ask God for our daily bread, which eminently respects our human condition. By fasting, by decreasing our consumption of food, we in fact express a greater openness to God. We show that we have 'other food' (Jn 4: 32), that we do not live "*by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*" as Jesus himself said when he was tempted in the desert (Mt : 4; cf. Deut 8, 3). In this way, the fasting Christian becomes an expression of our relationship to God, of our openness to his presence, of our need for his grace.

c- The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* comments on the request in the *Our Father* ... 'Give us this day our daily bread': "*This petition, with the responsibility it involves, also applies to another hunger from which men are perishing: "Man does not live by bread alone, but . . . by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," (Deut 8:3;*



*Mt 4:4) that is, by the Word he speaks and the Spirit he breathes forth. Christians must make every effort "to proclaim the good news to the poor." There is a famine on earth, "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD." (Amos 8:11) For this reason the specifically Christian sense of this fourth petition concerns the Bread of Life: the Word of God accepted in faith, the Body of Christ received in the Eucharist." (cfr. Jo 6, 26-58) (n. 2835)*

20- The Church has promulgated laws around fasting and abstinence. We are resistant to the word 'laws', that are nevertheless necessary to stimulate us to do good. Here are Canons 1249-1253 concerning penance and its usual forms.

*Can. 1249 The divine law binds all the Christian faithful to do penance each in his or her own way. In order for all to be united among themselves by some common observance of penance, however, penitential days are prescribed on which the Christian faithful devote themselves in a special way to prayer, perform works of piety and charity, and deny themselves by fulfilling their own obligations more faithfully and especially by observing fast and abstinence, according to the norm of the following canons.*

*Can. 1250 The penitential days and*

*times in the universal Church are every Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent.*

*Can. 1251 Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Episcopal Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, unless a solemnity should fall on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.*

*Can. 1252 The law of abstinence binds those who have completed their fourteenth year. The law of fasting binds*

*those who have attained their majority, until the beginning of their sixtieth year. Pastors of souls and parents are to ensure that even those, who by reason of their age are not bound by the law of fasting and abstinence, are taught the true meaning of penance.*

*Can. 1253 The conference of bishops can determine more precisely the*

*observance of fast and abstinence as well as substitute other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety, in whole or in part, for abstinence and fast.*

## 21- How to understand these Canons?

- a. Canon 1249 reminds us of this :
  - The law of God obliges all of us to do penance.
  - Each person can do the penance of their choice privately.
  - As members of the Church, we need gestures or community times of penance.
  - Penance is mainly expressed through prayer, works of piety and charity, self renouncement, faithful exercise of the duties of one's state in life, the practice of fasting and abstinence.

- b. What do fasting and abstinence concretely consist of?

Some people do not eat during the day; others are satisfied with bread and water. In fact, Blessed Pope Paul VI specifies the norms of the Church in the Apostolic Constitution *Paenitemini* (February 17, 1966):

*"The law of abstinence forbids the use of meat, but not of eggs, the products of milk or condiments made of animal fat.*

*"The law of fasting allows only one full meal a day, but does not prohibit taking some food in the morning and evening ..."*

- c. Canon 1250 specifies the days for penance : every Friday of the year, as well as the season of Lent.

It is quite understandable that Christians highlight Friday in a particular way, since this is the day when we recall the passion and death of the Lord, as each Sunday we call to mind his resurrection.

Lent that begins on Ash Wednesday, is also a community time favoured for penance.

- d. Canon 1251 indicates that each Friday, unless it coincides with a solemnity should be a day of abstinence (without meat). Two days require abstinence and fasting: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Some solemnities can coincide with the Friday and take precedence over it: first of January (Holy Mary Mother of God), March 19 (Saint Joseph), March 25 (Annunciation of the Lord); at the end of May or at the beginning of June (Sacred Heart of Jesus), June 13 in Timmins (Saint Anthony of Padua), June 21 (Saint John the Baptist), June 29 (Saint Peter and Saint Paul); August 15 (Assumption of the Blessed Virgin); November 1<sup>st</sup> (All the Saints);

December 8 (Immaculate Conception); December 25 (Christmas). Christmas and January 1<sup>st</sup> are also holy days of obligation, that is to say, we have to attend mass as on a Sunday.



Canon 1253 indicates that the Conference of Bishops can specify other methods for observance of fasting and abstinence, in particular through works of charity or exercises of piety.

Without abolishing the possibility of abstaining from meat on Friday, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops stipulated in 1984: *"Fridays are days of abstinence, but Catholics may substitute special acts of charity and piety on this day"* that the decree does not describe.

Following this legitimate measure of the Bishops, some people thought that Friday was no longer important in the lives of Catholics, that it had lost its penitential character. In fact, the Bishops hoped for the faithful to take their responsibilities: if they do not observe the universal law of abstinence from meat, they should determine with what work they will replace it: extended prayer, more effective charity; they could for example recite the rosary, make the Stations of the Cross, visit the sick or prisoners ...

By virtue of Canons 87 and 88, the diocesan Bishop can dispense with all or some prescriptions of the Conference decree if he judges it advantageous to the spiritual well-being of the faithful. According to Canon 1245, the parish priest can also, in certain particular cases, dispense with the obligation of fasting and abstinence on obligatory days or commute the obligation into other exercises of piety.

- e. Canon 1252 recalls that the faithful are bound to the law of abstinence from the age of 14; the law on fasting binds those who have reached the age of majority (18) until 59 years of age inclusive. It is the responsibility of parents and Christian educators to teach young children about the meaning of penance and renunciation.

- f. The season of Lent is also favoured for deepening the meaning of penance and conversion through penitential celebrations in which we meditate on the Word of God.
- g. Another form of fasting still exists, Eucharistic fasting, prescribed as preparation for Holy Communion: Canon 919

*§1. A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before Holy Communion from any food and drink, except for only water and medicine.*

*§2. A priest who celebrates the Most Holy Eucharist two or three times on the same day can take something before the second or third celebration even if there is less than one hour between them.*

*§3. The elderly, the infirm, and those who care for them can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have eaten something within the preceding hour.*

- h. In addition to fasting that consists of refraining from food or moderating its intake, the season of Lent invites a reflection on other forms of fasting, in the face of dependencies (alcoholic drinks, cigarettes, television, games, entertainment... ). Here each person can find a personal domain to retake control of his or her life and make more room for God.



## **22- Spiritual Application**

- a. Look at the place of penance in my personal life: How do I observe the law of abstinence and fasting, what do I give up?
- b. Rediscover the value of penance by meditating on the 4<sup>th</sup> Preface of Lent. *"For through bodily fasting you restrain our faults, raise up our minds and bestow virtue."*
- c. Meditate on the law of the Church: *"The fifth precept ("You shall observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence") ensures the times of asceticism and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts; they help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart."* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2043).
- d. Respect for Sunday is expressed particularly through faithful participation in the Eucharist. How do I show my respect for Friday, memorial of the passion and death of the Lord? If I do not observe the universal law of abstinence from meat on Fridays, what do I really replace it with?
- e. During this Lent, choose my personal form of fasting and what I renounce: abstaining from alcoholic drinks, shows, limiting television viewing time, entertainment; and replace it by time spent in prayer or works of charity.

- f. As parents and Christian educators, how do I teach the young about the meaning of renouncing something?

## IV – PRAYER

23- **P**rayer is like the heart of Lent ... through prayer, we pay greater attention to God. I have already dealt with this theme in my Pastoral Letter for Lent 2014. There I invited us to enter into the prayer of Jesus, the one that he said at the temple when he was 12 (n. 2), his evening and morning prayers (n. 3 et 4), prayer before making big decisions (n. 5); master of prayer (n. 6), Jesus teaches his disciples the *Our Father* (n.7); other excerpts from his prayer are offered to us (n. 8); he intercedes for Peter (n. 9), for the whole world in the priestly prayer (n. 10-12); he prays in the pain of agony (n. 14) and even on the Cross (n 15-16).

24- **W**e should allow his example to challenge us. As his disciples, we should pray ... we must have the will for it (n. 17), to learn (n. 18), to involve our body in it (n. 19); the content of prayer is varied (adoration, thanksgiving, praise, request, intercession) (n. 20); we can also pray with other people (couples, families), in Church (n. 21); the mass is the prayer *par excellence* (n. 22); we can be united to the official prayer of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours (n. 23), we use the psalms, prayer book of the Bible (n. 24); we can do a Eucharistic adoration (n. 25); we can pray orally and/or mentally (n. 26); try out the 'prayer of Jesus' (n. 27), Lectio Divina (28), meditation (n. 29), the rosary (n. 30), use holy images (n. 31), sacred places like the church (n. 32), the newspaper (n. 33) and sacred music (n. 34).



25- **O**ne saint (perhaps Saint Theresa of Avila) said that praying 15 minutes a day leads to holiness. In her book, "The Interior Castle", this great saint, a Doctor of the Church, recalled that through Baptism, God sees into the heart of our souls. Too often we are not attentive to his presence ... prayer is exactly the key that gives us access to the most important room, the one where God resides. Jesus said: "*We will come to him and make our home with him.*" (Jn 14: 23)

26- **T**he supreme prayer remains the Holy Mass. There, every Sunday, we hear the Word of God, we receive the Lord in Holy Communion. There we unite ourselves to the sacrifice of Christ who gave his life through love for us. We offer our lives to him and pray for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

27- **W**ithin the framework of our pastoral project, I have recalled the primordial importance during mass of the moment of communion, by inviting each person, priests



and faithful to experience a time of thanksgiving after communion. When there is no singing, we can remain silent for a few minutes of personal adoration, of intimate dialogue with Christ present within us. We can also privately or communally recite a psalm or other prayer of gratitude. We must make communion a real and personal encounter with the Lord and not a superficial act, mechanical and routine act. Some people stay in the church after mass to extend this unique time.

28- **D**uring Lent, many of the faithful attend mass every day to allow the Word of God to more fully permeate them, to enable them to be transformed by his grace. Parishes can organize the schedule of celebrations to facilitate this participation. Those who cannot attend mass due to their work or other reasons, read privately the readings that are proclaimed at mass. This is a beautiful way to be nourished by the Word of God.

29- **T**he Church gives great importance to Eucharistic adoration that I spoke about in my June 2014 Pastoral Letter. In many parishes, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed on the first Friday or first Thursday of the month. We receive many graces by praying before Jesus present in the Host. Even if the Blessed Sacrament is not exposed, the Lord is always present in the tabernacle and we can visit him.

30- **M**any people, the sick or elderly cannot get to church and receive communion where they live. To help make this moment a true encounter with the Lord, I have offered a prayer booklet for the person waiting for communion. For the one who brings communion to them, I have given some practical instructions. (*Communiqué* N. 95, February 11, 2017).



31- **T**he Church has an official prayer: the Liturgy of the Hours. It includes morning prayer (Lauds), evening prayer (Vespers), midday prayer, night prayer (Compline), an Office of Readings presents longer excerpts from the Word of God, reflections of the Fathers of the Church and some saints. At their ordination, deacons and priests committed to celebrate this liturgy every day. Men and women religious also do it according to the rules of their respective communities. Some lay faithful pray the Liturgy of the Hours, others through excerpts presented in booklets like *Magnificat*.

32- **A**mong the exercises of piety that the Church strongly encourages, we must give great importance to the Way of the Cross. During Lent, some parishes experience it every Friday. We can also do it privately. We must explain to children the meaning and value of the 14 images that adorn the walls of the church and go with them to remember with these images the passion and suffering of Christ.

- 33- **F**or Catholics, the rosary constitutes an excellent way of praying. In 2017, we celebrated the centennial of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin at Fatima where she asked that the rosary be recited every day. At the School of Mary we learn to enter more deeply into the mystery of her Son, as Saint John Paul II wrote so well in the Apostolic Letter that he dedicated to the rosary in 2002. The Joyful Mysteries are meditated on Monday and Saturday, the Sorrowful Mysteries on Tuesday and Friday, the Glorious Mysteries on Wednesday and Sunday and the Luminous Mysteries on Thursday. Some people recite the rosary in sections: two decades in the morning upon rising, one in the middle of the day, two in the evening.



- 34- **W**e can also read the Word of God: for example during Lent, read Matthew's Gospel fully (28 chapters) or Saint Mark's (16) or Saint Luke's (24) or Saint John's (21).
- 35- **I**n the framework of our pastoral project, every month we offer resources for spiritual sharing that can be used at meetings: a time of prayer, of listening to the Word of God and fraternal discussion on what resonates for us. In this way we can enlighten one another and support each other on our spiritual journey.
- 36- **I** entrusted each priest, deacon, person mandated for pastoral ministry, as well as each parish and each Catholic school with the responsibility to pray for the diocese every month on a set day. I am happy to see how well this initiative has been received. This is a way to remind us of the altruistic dimension of prayer and a source of grace for the life of the diocese.
- 37- **I** have prepared a booklet (attached) that collects the seven penitential psalms that the Church has favoured over the centuries and which often inspired the saints. They can be recited one per day or all together on Friday. They enable us to grow in the spirit of penitence, the will for conversion, the desire to become more conformed to Christ, to live our faith in a more consistent manner.

38- **Spiritual Application:**

- a. What place does prayer have in my life? What time do I set aside each day for prayer?
- b. What form of prayer appeals to me more?
- c. What steps can I take during Lent to have a more perfect prayer life?
- d. How do I experience the moment of communion at mass?

## V – ALMSGIVING : SHARING

39- The third work of Lent is almsgiving, sharing with the disadvantaged. We know that people live around us in situations of poverty: going without food, clothing, housing. Others are in the grip of illness, injustice, persecution, imprisonment.



40- In the Old Testament, the Lord recalled the fundamental character of helping the poor. The prophet Isaiah highlighted this in a text proclaimed on the Friday after Ash Wednesday: fasting that pleases God. (Is 58: 3-12)

*“Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself?*



*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free,*

*and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*

*Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.*

*The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*

*Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.”*

41- The Last Judgment Gospel (Mt 25: 31-46) reminds us of the necessity to help others in their misfortune. In this sense, Pope Francis promulgated the Holy Year of Mercy (2015-2016) that we also celebrated here, so that our *Diocesan Church Be Visible and Dynamic, a Place of Mercy*. The Pope wanted this momentum of mercy to be maintained in the

hearts of the faithful and to inspire their activities. For this purpose he wrote the Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera* (November 20, 2016). He even instituted a World Day of the Poor that is celebrated on the second last Sunday of the liturgical year.

42- In my Fall 2015 Pastoral Letter, I looked at the Corporal (n.23) and Spiritual (n.24) Works of Mercy that are still relevant. I know that throughout the diocese, many of the faithful are involved in different organizations that help the disadvantaged: fundraising, clothing and food drives, help with housing, volunteer hours, visiting the sick, people living alone or the elderly. We participate in *Development and Peace* campaigns highlighted by the Conference of Bishops in response to world disasters. We work for respect for life from conception to natural death. It is impressive and magnificent to see all of the people involved in the ministry of true charity.

43- Over the last two years, during our diocesan Marian celebration on September 8th, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, we have honoured people involved in service to the sick: staff from hospitals, parish volunteers who visit the sick, who help them with necessities, help them for transportation; priests and deacons, pastoral associates and other people who bring Holy Communion to them. This is an absolutely indispensable ministry.

44- Over the course of the next two years, we want to highlight young people in our Catholic schools who are involved in humanitarian service, who seek to ease the various misfortunes that they discover. Their teachers help them to be inspired by the example of Christ by putting themselves freely at the service of others.



*Picture of O'Gorman students volunteering this Winter at an Anti-Hunger Coalition Timmins (ACT) event*



*Jamaica project supervised by Sister Margot Génier, s.a.s.v.*

#### 45- Spiritual Application :

- a. What place does almsgiving, sharing have in my personal life?
- b. What are the places where I get involved?
- c. What organizations do I support?
- d. This Lent, what additional effort can I make in the areas of charity, of almsgiving?
- e. How do I encourage young people to give of themselves in the example of Christ?

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**We** are thus invited to take advantage of this Lent to intensify our lives as disciples of Christ.

**We** cannot be satisfied with being spiritually mediocre and lukewarm or simply consumers.

**We** can make progress by committing ourselves, each one personally, to use these three ways, inseparable, one from the other, that the Church proposes to us for this time of grace:

Fasting : work on ourselves and control of our choices.

Prayer : work on our relationship with God.

Almsgiving : work on our commitment in the face of misfortune.

May Lent 2018 be an opportunity for spiritual growth!



✠ Serge Poitras,  
Bishop of Timmins.

February 2, 2018 - Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple.



**A ROAD OF  
RECONCILIATION  
WITH GOD, WITH  
OURSELVES AND  
WITH OTHERS!**