

Pastoral Letter for Lent 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

ON 5 March 2014, Ash Wednesday, we undertake a path of conversion as individuals and as a community, leading to Easter Sunday, preparing to live and proclaim the joy of the Risen Christ.

Prayer, fasting and works of love.

Prayer is the lifeblood of our relationship with God. We meet Jesus and listen to him speaking in our hearts. We are encouraged to keep our Church as our holy place for prayer and silence, and to meet for prayer more regularly during Lent, and sanctify each day by our prayer at home.



Attendance at Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, reflection on the Scriptures and personal prayer nourish this relationship from which springs our relationship with others.

Fasting sharpens our vision and our readiness in mind and heart to love God and others, rather than ourselves. As a community we fast and abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On other days, discipline in eating and drinking trains us for our journey with Christ, who spent 40 days in the desert in prayer and penance.

Works of love are the fruit of prayer and penance. Pope Francis reminds us that though Jesus was rich, for our sake he became poor. When Jesus was baptised by John, he did so not because he was in need of repentance or conversion; he did it to be among people who needed forgiveness and to take upon himself the burden of our sins.

The Pope encourages us to acquire a new awareness of those who are in destitution—poverty without faith or hope. He challenges us to be alert in binding the wounds of those who suffer material destitution—lacking basic rights, food, water and work; moral destitution—maybe a brother or sister is in the thrall of alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, or no longer sees meaning in life; or spiritual destitution—which we experience when we turn away from God and reject his love. The Gospel is the antidote to destitution. We are called to proclaim the liberating news that forgiveness for sins is possible, because God freely loves us at all times, and asks us to be joyous heralds of his mercy and hope.

Parishes, communities and individuals might consider what can be done to walk with people in their suffering, whether through Project Compassion, Caritas, or by personal example. This shows the logic of love and the responsibility that springs from taking on the yoke of Christ. We realise that in giving we receive.

May this Lent be a time of transforming prayer and challenge, of love and joy in the Gospel and of gifted Christian outreach to our sisters and brothers who, like us, are encircled with the infinite love and compassion of God.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE