



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

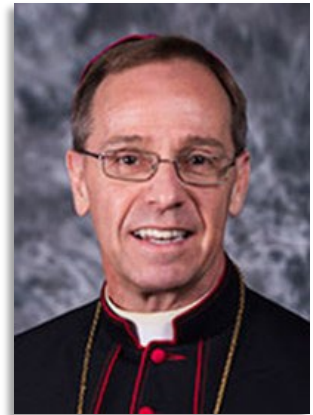
The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Lent, a time of repentance and renewal

Last Wednesday, we blessed and distributed ashes as a sign that we are mortal and totally dependent on God’s grace. At the request of Pope Francis, we also prayed and fasted on Ash Wednesday for peace in the Ukraine. As we continue our journey on the first Sunday of Lent, we are reminded that this is a time of repentance and renewal in preparation for both the sorrow of Christ’s passion and death, and the joy of the Lord’s resurrection. Lent 2022 comes at a time when our world is weary and disillusioned due to years of pandemic, economic and political turmoil, and social discord. More than ever, it seems, we need this “favorable time” to renew our spirits and to regain a vibrant hope for the future—what the Holy Father calls “a foretaste of Easter joy.”



Especially now, we are prone to weariness and discouragement, and we run the risk of losing hope in the presence and power of God. As Pope Francis says, “Bitter disappointment at shattered dreams, deep concern for the challenges ahead, and discouragement at the poverty of our resources, can make us tempted to seek refuge in self-centeredness and indifference to the suffering of others.” Still, Lent can be a graced moment for us if we use this time to “place our faith and hope in the Lord,” and to ask for forgiveness regularly in the Sacrament of Penance.

Lent can indeed be a favorable time—if we can seize this opportunity and become fully engaged in this Spirit-filled season of grace! We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide and encourage us as we undertake this Lenten journey with patience, perseverance, and confident hope in our Lord’s resurrection. Let us not be discouraged by the long dark days of winter. Christ is our light and our hope. May our hearts be filled with His Holy Spirit as we journey together to meet Him with Easter joy!

Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Those are the traditional terms for three very simple, but also very powerful, actions that are designed to make us ready to accept

the healing power of Jesus that comes to us in a special way at Easter. Through prayer, we humbly and honestly confess our sins—all the ways that we turn away from God and from our sisters and brothers to pursue our own selfish desires. In prayer, we realign ourselves with God's will for us—praying from the heart, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven." We open ourselves to God's will for us. We let go of our selfishness, and we let God's love heal us and guide us in our daily living.

Through fasting, we are reminded that just because we want something doesn't mean we need it or that it's good for us. Fasting helps us turn away from the pampered, me-centered life that we are urged to live by our modern culture, especially through the advertising and the entertainment media we're all exposed to every day. "If it feels good, do it. Or if your neighbor has it, you should buy it. Or if you want it, go for it."

Fasting and self-denial remind us that there is much more to life than satisfying our own desires. We fast in order to prepare ourselves for lives of genuine service and sacrifice as disciples of Jesus Christ.

During Lent, we observe the ancient traditions of fast and abstinence because we know that they lead to spiritual health and to the joy that is made possible only by Christ's passion, death and resurrection.

Through almsgiving—generous sharing of our time, talent and treasure—we discover that the best way to free ourselves from the negative power of selfishness and sin is to open our hearts (and our wallets) and give to others. Have you ever known a generous person who was miserable, or self-centered or stuck in his or her sinfulness?

Giving is the opposite of self centeredness. It is the solution to the loneliness and despair that come when we believe the media hype that tells us the more we have the happier we will be. The practice of almsgiving helps us remember that we are happiest when we share with others—rejoicing in the knowledge that God has shared with us his gifts of life and love and thus made us his free sons and daughters.

The Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent (Mk 1:12–15) tells us that we are not alone in facing temptation. St. Mark tells us that "the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert" (Mk 1:12), suggesting, perhaps, that the Lord's human nature might have preferred staying where it was more comfortable. Obedient to the "driving" of the Holy Spirit, Jesus went to the desert and stayed there for 40 days "tempted by Satan" (Mk 1:13). Fortunately, he was not alone. St. Mark tells us "he was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him" (Mk 1:13).

The Church proposes the season of Lent as a "desert experience" for us, not because we are eager to do penance but because it's good for us to follow the Lord's example and seek out opportunities for renewal. If we respond with open minds and hearts, we will be given a chance to confront the demons that tempt us to selfishness and sin. We will also experience the ministry of angels who comfort us with the certainty of God's love and mercy.

This year, the images we use to emphasize the spiritual journey that is at the heart of Christian life are especially poignant because we are preparing for the 2023 Synod of Bishops. This worldwide synodal process initiated by Pope Francis last year can be described as an extended Lenten journey. Its themes—Communion, Participation and Mission—call our attention to the meaning of our lives as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

This Lent, let's go to the desert with our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's confess our sins and open our hearts to God's mercy. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are Lenten virtues, but we should practice them all year long if we want to be truly happy.

+Charles C. Thompson
Archbishop of Indianapolis

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope **MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2022**

“Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all” (Gal 6:9-10)



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a favorable time for personal and community renewal, as it leads us to the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For our Lenten journey in 2022, we will do well to reflect on Saint Paul's exhortation to the Galatians: “Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity (kairós), let us do good to all” (Gal 6:9-10).

1. Sowing and reaping

In these words, the Apostle evokes the image of sowing and reaping, so dear to Jesus (cf. Mt 13). Saint Paul speaks to us of a kairós: an opportune time for sowing goodness in view of a future harvest. What is this “opportune time” for us? Lent is certainly such an opportune time, but so is our entire existence, of which Lent is in some way an image. [1] All too often in our lives, greed, pride and the desire to possess, accumulate and consume have the upper hand, as we see from the story of the foolish man in the Gospel parable, who thought his life

was safe and secure because of the abundant grain and goods he had stored in his barns (cf. Lk 12:16-21). Lent invites us to conversion, to a change in mindset, so that life's truth and beauty may be found not so much in possessing as in giving, not so much in accumulating as in sowing and sharing goodness.

The first to sow is God himself, who with great generosity "continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness in our human family" (Fratelli Tutti, 54). During Lent we are called to respond to God's gift by accepting his word, which is "living and active" (Heb 4:12). Regular listening to the word of God makes us open and docile to his working (cf. Jas 1:21) and bears fruit in our lives. This brings us great joy, yet even more, it summons us to become God's co-workers (cf. 1 Cor 3:9). By making good use of the present time (cf. Eph 5:16), we too can sow seeds of goodness. This call to sow goodness should not be seen as a burden but a grace, whereby the Creator wishes us to be actively united with his own bountiful goodness.

What about the harvest? Do we not sow seeds in order to reap a harvest? Of course! Saint Paul points to the close relationship between sowing and reaping when he says: "Anyone who sows sparsely will reap sparsely as well, and anyone who sows generously will reap generously as well" (2 Cor 9:6). But what kind of harvest are we talking about? A first fruit of the goodness we sow appears in ourselves and our daily lives, even in our little acts of kindness. In God, no act of love, no matter how small, and no "generous effort" will ever be lost (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 279). Just as we recognize a tree by its fruits (cf. Mt 7:16, 20), so a life full of good deeds radiates light (cf. Mt 5:14-16) and carries the fragrance of Christ to the world (cf. 2 Cor 2:15). Serving God in freedom from sin brings forth fruits of sanctification for the salvation of all (cf. Rom 6:22).

In truth, we see only a small portion of the fruits of what we sow, since, according to the Gospel proverb, "one sows, while another reaps" (Jn 4:37). When we sow for the benefit of others, we share in God's own benevolent love: "it is truly noble to place our hope in the hidden power of the seeds of goodness we sow, and thus to initiate processes whose fruits will be reaped by others" (Fratelli Tutti, 196). Sowing goodness for the benefit of others frees us from narrow self-interest, infuses our actions with gratuitousness, and makes us part of the magnificent horizon of God's benevolent plan.

The word of God broadens and elevates our vision: it tells us that the real harvest is eschatological, the harvest of the last, undying day. The mature fruit of our lives and actions is "fruit for eternal life" (Jn 4:36), our "treasure in heaven" (Lk 12:33; 18:22). Jesus himself uses the image of the seed that dies in the ground in order to bear fruit as a symbol of the mystery of his death and resurrection (cf. Jn 12:24); while Saint Paul uses the same image to speak of the resurrection of our bodies: "What is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable; what is sown is contemptible but what is raised is glorious; what is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful; what is sown is a natural body, and what is raised is a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:42-44). The hope of resurrection is the great light that the risen Christ brings to the world, for "if our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are of all people the most pitiable. In fact, however,

Christ has been raised from the dead, as the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:19-20). Those who are intimately united to him in love “by dying a death like his” (Rom 6:5) will also be united to his resurrection for eternal life (cf. Jn 5:29). “Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:43).

2. “Let us not grow tired of doing good”

Christ’s resurrection enlivens earthly hopes with the “great hope” of eternal life, planting the seed of salvation in our present time (cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 3; 7). Bitter disappointment at shattered dreams, deep concern for the challenges ahead and discouragement at the poverty of our resources, can make us tempted to seek refuge in self-centeredness and indifference to the suffering of others. Indeed, even our best resources have their limitations: “Youths grow tired and weary, the young stumble and fall” (Is 40:30). Yet God “gives strength to the weary, he strengthens the powerless... Those who hope in the Lord will regain their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles; though they run they will not grow weary, though they walk they will never tire” (Is 40:29, 31). The Lenten season calls us to place our faith and hope in the Lord (cf. 1 Pet 1:21), since only if we fix our gaze on the risen Christ (cf. Heb 12:2) will we be able to respond to the Apostle’s appeal, “Let us never grow tired of doing good” (Gal 6:9).

Let us not grow tired of praying. Jesus taught us to “pray always without becoming weary” (Lk 18:1). We need to pray because we need God. Thinking that we need nothing other than ourselves is a dangerous illusion. If the pandemic has heightened the awareness of our own personal and social fragility, may this Lent allow us to experience the consolation provided by faith in God, without whom we cannot stand firm (cf. Is 7:9). No one attains salvation alone, since we are all in the same boat, amid the storms of history; [2] and certainly no one reaches salvation without God, for only the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ triumphs over the dark waters of death. Faith does not spare us life’s burdens and tribulations, but it does allow us to face them in union with God in Christ, with the great hope that does not disappoint, whose pledge is the love that God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:1-5).

Let us not grow tired of uprooting evil from our lives. May the corporal fasting to which Lent calls us fortify our spirit for the battle against sin. Let us not grow tired of asking for forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, knowing that God never tires of forgiving. [3] Let us not grow tired of fighting against concupiscence, that weakness which induces to selfishness and all evil, and finds in the course of history a variety of ways to lure men and women into sin (cf. Fratelli Tutti, 166). One of these is addiction to the digital media, which impoverishes human relationships. Lent is a propitious time to resist these temptations and to cultivate instead a more integral form of human communication (ibid., 43) made up of “authentic encounters” (ibid., 50), face-to-face and in person.

Let us not grow tired of doing good in active charity towards our neighbors. During this Lent, may we practice almsgiving by giving joyfully (cf. 2 Cor 9:7). God who “supplies seed to the sower and bread for food” (2 Cor 9:10) enables each of us not only to have food to eat, but also to be generous in doing good to others. While it is true that we have our entire life to sow goodness, let us take special advantage of this Lenten season to care for those close to us and to reach out to our brothers and sisters who lie wounded along the path of life (cf. Lk 10:25-37). Lent is a favorable time to seek out – and not to avoid – those in need; to reach out – and not to ignore – those who need a sympathetic ear and a good word; to visit – and not to abandon – those who are lonely. Let us put into practice our call to do good to all, and take time to love the poor and needy, those abandoned and rejected, those discriminated against and marginalized (cf. Fratelli Tutti, 193).

3. “If we do not give up, we shall reap our harvest in due time”

Each year during Lent we are reminded that “goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day” (ibid., 11). Let us ask God to give us the patient perseverance of the farmer (cf. Jas 5:7), and to persevere in doing good, one step at a time. If we fall, let us stretch out our hand to the Father, who always lifts us up. If we are lost, if we are misled by the enticements of the evil one, let us not hesitate to return to God, who “is generous in forgiving” (Is 55:7). In this season of conversion, sustained by God’s grace and by the communion of the Church, let us not grow tired of doing good. The soil is prepared by fasting, watered by prayer and enriched by charity. Let us believe firmly that “if we do not give up, we shall reap our harvest in due time” and that, with the gift of perseverance, we shall obtain what was promised (cf. Heb 10:36), for our salvation and the salvation of others (cf. 1 Tim 4:16). By cultivating fraternal love towards everyone, we are united to Christ, who gave his life for our sake (cf. 2 Cor 5:14-15), and we are granted a foretaste of the joy of the kingdom of heaven, when God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

May the Virgin Mary, who bore the Savior in her womb and “pondered all these things in her heart” (Lk2:19), obtain for us the gift of patience. May she accompany us with her maternal presence, so that this season of conversion may bring forth fruits of eternal salvation.

My Prayer for You

As we undertake this Lenten journey, and prepare for the 2023 Synod of Bishops, let’s ask the Holy Spirit to guide us. May we use this season of grace to listen prayerfully, to encounter Jesus in Word, Sacrament, and Service, and to discern God’s will for our Church. Amen.

+ Charles C. Thompson