

LENTEN REFLECTION - ASH WEDNESDAY

Lent as a Time of Hope



Take a Lenten Journey

Lenten Reflection - Ash Wednesday

Lent as a Time of Hope

Ash Wednesday: March 6, 2019

First Reading

Joel 2: 12-18

The prophet Joel challenges us to “rend your hearts...and return to the Lord, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.” Issued to the entire community, it is a corporate summons to repent: “Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly; gather the people, notify the congregation...” All this is to happen with the whole community acknowledging that God is gracious and merciful.

“A Call to Hope, A Call to Act” is also a corporate summons. As with all pastoral letters, Bishop Libasci message is for everyone in the diocese: priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, and lay people of all ages. The letter addresses the various aspects of his initiative, Restore, Renew, Proclaim the Hope that is Christ and specifies particular actions and attitudes necessary for it to bear good fruit.

The Lenten journey to Easter can only happen by choosing to step into the season. Stepping into the disciplines of

Lent each day is walking a sure path with the all the saints who have gone before us. The corporate summons to repent from the prophet Joel and to hope and act from Bishop Libasci include a corporate journey that promises to restore and renew us in proclaiming the hope that is Christ.

Think

In her book, *The Hope of Lent*, Diane M. Houdek points out that we might have a tendency to see that the hope of Lent has to do with our hope of getting through it. In contrast to this she says, “The greatest hope of Lent is the discovery that it’s not only about penance, deprivation, spiritual struggles, and rooting out sin in our lives. Those are often the things we do during Lent. But the hope of Lent lies in what God does.”

What hopes do you have for Lent this year?

What changes do you want to see in your life, in the world?

How will you look for what God is doing in you this Lent?

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Take a Lenten Journey (cont'd.)

Lenten Reflection - Ash Wednesday

Pray

Recall an occasion when you experienced God's love and mercy. Reflect on how this experience is an assurance of God's fidelity and His desire to lavish forgiveness on you when you seek it.

Include an Act of Contrition or the Our Father in your daily prayer.

Ask in prayer for the grace to extend forgiveness to someone who hurt you.

Act

Consider one way or a series of ways you and/or your family can witness to hope. Consider doing one or two of the following actions this week:

Pointing out the good/positive qualities/aspects of people and situations

Not complaining about other people or things

Advocating for a social justice issue

Act of Contrition

My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance, to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.

(Rite of Penance)

LENTEN REFLECTION WEEK 1

Change and Transformation



Change and Transformation

Week 1: March 10, 2019

First Sunday of Lent

Luke 4: 1-13

The Holy Spirit filled Jesus at his baptism and led Jesus into the desert. For forty days and nights, Jesus prayed and fasted. At the end of his time in the desert, he faced temptations related to his ministry and his relationship with His Father. Faithful obedience empowered Him, the “Beloved Son”, to overcome the hostility to his mission. His trust in his Father will not only continue to sustain him during trials and conflicts but also enable him to liberate women and men held captive by the devil.

In the first sentence of his pastoral letter, “A Call to Hope, A Call to Act”, Bishop Libasci states, “As we transition from our year of prayer and preparation for implementing Restore, Renew, Proclaim the Hope that is Christ, now is a good time to reflect on where we have been and how we have been transformed.” The time of prayerful preparation for all in the diocese has ended and we are actively strengthening lifelong faith formation and renewing sacrament preparation in our parishes, schools and home schools. Our bishop asks us to reflect on “where we have been and how we have changed and been transformed.”

The bishop’s request can be a desert-like experience for us as a diocese. In the process of our Lenten practices, we can

reflect on and name how God has been present to us in the past year in people, circumstances and events. Also as a diocese, Lent offers us a time for continuing change and transformation through prayer, fasting and acts of charity.

Think

Who are the people and what are the events in the past year that help you be more aware of God’s faithful love? In times of change and transition, what grace(s) help you trust more deeply in God’s love and fidelity? How is your parish community witnessing to God’s faithful love?

Pray

Pray the Our Father slowly and reflectively each day this week. Focus on the praise and trust in God’s will it expresses and the transformation it asks of you.

Act

Read again the first two paragraphs of Bishop Libasci’s pastoral letter, “A Call to Hope, A Call to Act”. Choose a way that you will “give life to these discussions.” Consider talking about the bishop’s initiative, Restore, Renew, Proclaim the Hope that is Christ, and/or his pastoral letter, with your family, friends, co-workers. Commit to striving to change and be transformed throughout your life by participating in parish faith formation and receiving the sacraments.



Turning Points

Week 2: March 17, 2019

Second Sunday of Lent

Luke 9: 28b – 36

Luke relates in today's Gospel that Jesus, proclaimed as Son of God at his baptism, appears with Moses and Elijah, two great prophets rejected by the people. The Transfiguration is an experience that gives Peter, James, John and us, a glimpse of the glory of Jesus and the next phase of his ministry, namely his journey to Jerusalem. The experience is a turning point. The voice from the cloud says, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." The disciples are to be attentive to God's Son as he prepares to return to God via the cross. It requires of them a new way of seeing Jesus and of understanding his mission.

Bishop Libasci states in "A Call to Hope, A Call to Act" that strengthening our commitment to lifelong faith formation involves "hope and excitement as well as some concerns." He continues, "It will require new ways of seeing and doing what has been happening for many years in faith formation." Like the disciples "overcome by sleep", we may be comfortable doing things the same way year after year. We may see faith formation as something just for children and teens. Realizing we do not know everything about our faith is the first step toward becoming "fully awake" and seeing things in a new light.

Our baptism marks us as disciples of Christ sent to share the Good News of God's Kingdom. Lent is a time of preparation for recommitting ourselves to our baptism at Easter. Our fasting, prayer and acts of charity help us to be "fully awake" to grace, the life of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit within us.

Think

What is one area of your life you need to see in a new light? What is one way you can reach out to people beyond your parish community and share the Good News of Christ with them?

Pray

Turning points are significant moments in life. Remember in your prayer people you know, especially young adults, who are facing turning points in their lives. It may be in terms of their vocation, career, faith, finances, housing, etc. Specifically name in your prayer the people you know in these circumstances and entrust them to God's guidance and care.

Act

Set aside time each day this week to be more attentive to the ordinary events in your daily life: the people, places and things. Open yourself to the possibility of being transformed by the beauty and simplicity of their ordinariness.



Sustaining Hope

Week 3: March 24, 2019

Third Sunday of Lent

Luke 13: 1 – 9

Today's Gospel passage, found only in Luke, shows Jesus as compassionate yet insistent. He is adamant that sinners need to repent and patiently extends another opportunity to them to change. His behavior and approach is consistent when it comes to his disciples and to us, since all are sinners. Stumbling along the way does not exclude any one from being his disciple. When it comes to repentance, continual procrastination and resisting change are significant obstacles to growth in discipleship. The fig tree is unproductive yet is given another year to produce fruit.

In the section, The Family & Parish Community of Bishop Libasci's Pastoral Letter, *A Call to Hope, a Call to Act*, Bishop Libasci reminds us that with the new pattern for celebrating the sacrament of Confirmation with younger members of the Church, it is vitally important for us "to continue to listen to their needs, questions, desires, hopes and challenges." Families and parish communities have unique opportunities to be present to youth. At the same time, families and parish communities share the responsibility of handing on the faith. Like the landowner in the Gospel, our role is to cultivate the ground and fertilize the tree. With our prayer, support and witness to the Catholic way of life, we encourage young people to continue to grow in faith, develop virtues and produce good fruit through acts of mercy.

Think

How has an older family member or parishioner helped you grow in your faith? How can you walk with, accompany, a younger member of your family or parish community and help form them as a disciple of Christ?

Pray

Pray the Act of Hope each day this week to deepen hope within you and to see the potential for growth in yourself, others, our church and society.

Act of Hope

O Lord God,
I hope by your grace for the pardon
of all my sins
and after life here to gain eternal happiness
because you have promised it
who are infinitely powerful, faithful, kind,
and merciful.

In this hope I intend to live and die.
Amen.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance is available more frequently during Lent in many parishes both for individuals and in communal celebrations. Ask for the grace to be more open to change as you prepare to celebrate this sacrament of pardon and peace.

Act

Encourage in word and/or deed younger members of your family, parish or in your work place.

Pray for younger members of your family and parish, especially those making decisions about high school, college, and their vocation in life.

Contact the Catechetical Leader or Youth Minister in your parish and let them know you are praying for and with them and their important ministry. Consider asking how you can assist them during a single event or as an ongoing commitment.

LENTEN REFLECTION WEEK 4

Choices and Forgiveness



Choices and Forgiveness

Week 4: March 31, 2019

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

“The Parable of the Prodigal Son” is very familiar to us. Some scholars debate that a more appropriate title would be “The Parable of the Forgiving Father.” Whichever title you may prefer, the entire story is really based on what it means to be in a loving relationship. The younger son broke his relationship with his father because he wanted to satisfy his needs immediately. The older son didn’t seem to have a very good relationship with his father. Through all of it, we hear of the father’s over-abundant, unexpected, acts of love. The father was humiliated in front of the whole community by both of his sons, yet he rebuked neither of them. The younger son was offered complete restoration to his former status. He accepted it. The older son was offered the same. He rejected it.

In his pastoral letter, Bishop Libasci challenges all of us to accompany each other on a journey that is often difficult and somewhat unpredictable. We have choices to make. “We face many decisions about how we live in relationship with others...The Holy Spirit guides our discernment and gives us the gifts we need.” We can choose to walk with each other, care for each other and forgive each other. On the other hand, we can choose isolation and selfishness.

Our choices will determine how we make our way in this world. How will our choices, “our words and deeds witness to the foundation of our faith?”

Think

The father was the hero in this story. He extended grace to both sons, deserving or not. He felt compassion as he saw his son returning home. When people come back to you after causing a break in your relationship, do you find it easy to extend forgiveness? Can you think of a time when you extended forgiveness? A time when you withheld it?

Pray

Focus on God’s unconditional love for you. Take some quiet time to reflect on the ways God has extended love and forgiveness to you, and how, with God’s help, you can begin to repair a broken relationship.

Act

Read two sections (A Lifelong Journey Together and Enriching Evangelization) of Bishop Libasci’s pastoral letter, “A Call to Hope, A Call to Act.” Choose a way that you will “see others in a new light.”



All Things Made New

Week 5: April 7, 2019

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Isaiah 43: 16-21

This passage was written from the perspective of exiles who were awaiting release from a foreign land. They were always encouraged to remember what God had done throughout salvation history. Their faith was based on the liberating events of the past. What God had done before, God would surely do again! Israel was a people of memory so they must have been perplexed when God's spokesman told them to "remember not the events of the past."

Most likely Isaiah was calling them away from too much dependence on the past because it would prevent them from seeing the astonishing new thing God was doing right before their eyes! God opened the waters so the chosen people could pass through. God provided refreshing life-giving water in the desert. This same God can certainly fashion this defeated people into a new and vibrant race.

We are often blinded to the new things God is doing in our lives because of our inordinate dependence on the past. While we are not called to condemn the things of the past, we are challenged to look beyond them to something new. The end of Bishop Libasci's pastoral letter asks us to commit to moving forward—to see things with new eyes, to continue to learn and support each other, to reinvigorate our sacramental life, to live "our baptismal call

to live in union with the Trinity and with each other and to care for the most vulnerable." We can trust that God will make all things new!

Think

Remember a time in your life when you felt that God was no longer with you and you began to lose hope. What helped you recall the times that God was with you, supporting you and loving you?

Pray

"Our God is the God Who creates newness, because He is the God of surprises." (Pope Francis, August 2017) Ask for the grace to be open to the newness God offers you every day.

Act

Christ has the power to transform us completely—from the inside out. He will make all things new. Make a commitment to share this Good News at home, at work, over coffee.