

Put Out Into the Deep

Prayer, Penance and Works of Charity



Bishop DiMarzio

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Next week we begin the season of Lent, a time when we prepare for Holy Week and Easter, the commemoration of Jesus' Death and Resurrection. During Lent we also prepare for our own death and resurrection. It is a time for personal prayer, penance and works of charity. It is truly our time – a time when we accompany Jesus in remembrance of the 40 days He spent in the desert, being tempted and overcoming temptation.

Each year, the Holy Father issues a message for the Lenten season. This year, Pope Benedict XVI has chosen the theme, "They shall look on Him whom they have pierced," coming from John's Gospel 19:37. Those who first looked upon Jesus as He was pierced were Mary, His Mother; John, His beloved disciple, and Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the apostles. These three, who were close to Jesus in a very personal way, stood with Him until the end and recognized the love with which He gave His life for the salvation of the world. When His side was pierced, there came forth blood and water, the symbol of the birth of the Church and of the sacrament of our rebirth, Baptism itself. It is during the season of Lent that we accompany the elect and the candidates for the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism. Next week, I will speak directly to that responsibility we have as the Church in Brooklyn and Queens.

In his message, our Holy Father cites the teaching he gave in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love). He gives us the philosophical and theological distinction between agape, self-giving love, and eros, a love of one who desires to possess what he or she lacks and yearns for union with the beloved.

God's love for us certainly is what we call agape; it is a selfless love, a love of the Father who gave His only begotten Son for our salvation. As creatures, we are sometimes capable of self-giving love and we continually strive for it. Most of the time, however, our love is what is called eros, a love that does not reach the degree of love in agape. Lent is a time when we strive for that higher degree of love, a time when we look on He who was pierced and recognize the overwhelming love God has for us. It is a time when we can make up for our lack of love in the past, our sins. It is a time when we can understand the Father's great love for us.

The Lenten program is clearly enunciated with the readings of Ash Wednesday. It is a program that Jesus Himself outlines for us: we must pray, do penance and we must do the works of charity. Lent is a time of more intense prayer, a time when we can redouble our efforts to maintain our union with God. For some it means making a retreat or a day of recollection, for others it is taking more time for personal prayer each day, or perhaps take a more meditative approach to the rosary, or engage in attending the Eucharist daily, when this is not one's habit.

The works of penance perhaps are more difficult for us to understand and acquire. Fasting, which was once so characteristic of our Lenten observance, was externally imposed by numerous regulations; however, once we internalized what we were required to do, or perhaps take a more meditative approach to the rosary, or engage in attending the Eucharist daily, when this is not one's habit, it became an opportunity for growth in self-denial. Our Lenten regulations now are rather easy in comparison to the past. We are only required to abstain on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday; however,

on each Friday during Lent we are asked to abstain from meat unless it is impossible. There are many other ways of fasting, both bodily and spiritually. We fast in order to understand better what we have received from God and what we can give back to Him. Finally, the works of charity are always characteristic of our Lenten observance, because when we give of ourselves to others, we mirror the love of God for us.

The Annual Catholic Appeal is one way those in our diocese can enter into the spirit of sacrificial giving. There are many other ways, however, including the Operation Rice Bowl collection, which has been recommended to our parishes this year, in an effort to feed the poor of the world and at the same time assist the feeding of the poor in our own diocese. There are numerous ways in which we can give of our resources so that we can recognize our dependence on God who has given us everything.

Lent certainly is typically an exercise of putting out into the deep. We are called to stretch a bit to redouble our efforts through prayer, penance and works of charity. We are not called to be complacent, but to be enthusiastic about developing our relationship with God.

As we enter this Lenten season, I ask you to pray for myself and for the members of the Diocesan Curia as we make a pre-Lenten retreat at the Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington on the days before Ash Wednesday. It gives us an opportunity to pray together as the core staff of the Diocese of Brooklyn. This year we will concentrate through reflection and prayer on how we can become better agents of the New Evangelization.

May your observance of Lent lead you to a deeper appreciation of the Paschal Mystery.

Jamaica Pastor Is Placed on Leave

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio has placed a Queens pastor on administrative leave from active priestly ministry after accepting the Diocesan Review Board's finding that an allegation against the priest of inappropriate behavior with a young man more than two decades ago was credible.

The bishop announced his decision on the status of Father Robert J. McConnin in a letter read to parishioners of St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church, where he had served as pastor since 1997. Father John W. Maloney, the Episcopal Vicar, read the letter at the conclusion of the six weekend Masses Feb. 10-11.

As a priest on administrative leave, Father McConnin may not present himself as a priest, celebrate Mass publicly or administer the sacraments, the letter said. He is permitted to offer Mass privately.

Bishop DiMarzio said the diocese will submit documentation on the matter to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican "for its own review and any direction it may wish to provide to our Diocese as to any further action it wishes us to take."

In his letter, the bishop apologized to the victim "on behalf of the Church and in particular of the Diocese of Brooklyn, for the emotional suffering he has endured over these many years." He said "even the passage of time" has not caused him

to forget "a difficult experience encountered at an early stage in his life."

The bishop asked the parishioners of St. Nicholas of Tolentine "to pray for the person who came forward with the allegation" and also to remember "the good works he (Father McConnin) has performed in more than 33 years of his priesthood." The allegation did not come from someone who had any association with the Jamaica parish.

The diocesan toll-free line established by the diocese in 2004 received the report of the allegation, which was presented to the Diocesan Review Board, a panel of eight – mostly laypersons – experienced in social services, family life, medicine, the law and law enforcement. The bishop described them as persons of "outstanding integrity and good judgment" who are "generous in their commitment to serving the Church on these difficult matters."

After an investigation, the review board prepared a report that concluded that the allegation was credible and presented the findings to the bishop for his consideration. The bishop studied the report and reached the decision that he announced in his letter to the parishioners.

Bishop DiMarzio said the Kings District Attorney's Office was notified when the diocese received the report of the allegation.

Healing Team

Ten members of the Diocesan Healing Intervention Team were available following the Masses to speak with parishioners who wanted to comment on the information they heard. Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, O.P., the diocesan Victims Assistance Coordinator, said the reactions were of "shock and surprise."

Bishop DiMarzio's letter invited "anyone who as a minor was the victim of improper behavior by a member of the clergy of this Diocese" to report the information to the diocesan toll-free reporting line: (888) 634-4499.

"As in the case presented here," the letter said, "a caller will be treated courteously and with respect."

Stating that "this continues to be a challenging time for our Church," Bishop DiMarzio said he was praying for the parishioners of St. Nicholas of Tolentine "as you receive this disturbing information."

THE TABLET, FEBRUARY 17, 2007

Prayers for Utah Mall Victims

SALT LAKE CITY (CNS) – Msgr. J. Terrence Fitzgerald, administrator of the Diocese of Salt Lake City, called on Catholics Feb. 13 to unite in prayer for victims of a shooting spree at a shopping mall and their families and for the gunman and his family.

Five people were killed and at least four more were wounded in a shooting spree at Trolley Square in Salt Lake City on Feb. 12. The gunman was fatally shot by police. Authorities were trying to figure out what sparked the rampage.

"We pray for everyone who has been traumatized by this violent event, including the police officers involved, the rescue workers, Trolley Square employees, and all of the people who were in the mall at the time of the shootings," said Msgr. Fitzgerald.



Bishop DiMarzio's Calendar

Sunday-Tuesday, Feb. 18-20
Curial Retreat, Immaculate
Conception Seminary, Huntington.

Wednesday, Feb. 21 – 12:10 p.m.
Mass and distribution of ashes, St.
James Cathedral Basilica,
Brooklyn.

Thursday, Feb. 22 – 10 a.m., N.Y.
State Catholic Conference Public
Policy Committee meeting, Albany.

Friday-Sunday, Feb. 23-25
Vocation and Discernment Retreat,
Immaculate Conception Center,
Douglaston.