

Lent 2016 - Mercy not Sacrifice

The holy season of Lent is an opportunity for each of us to take stock of our relationship with the Lord and with each other. Pope Francis in his lenten message, uses the Gospel of St. Matthew to remind us that God expects mercy from us, and during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, lent is a most appropriate time to examine our works of mercy towards one another. Pope Francis emphasizes the need to practice the Corporal Works of Mercy and in doing so, we enter into a deeper understanding of ourselves and our need for God's mercy in our own lives. It also helps us to see how we can practice the Spiritual Works of Mercy in our prayer, instruction and assistance to others. He says: "God's mercy transforms human hearts; it enables us, through the experience of a faithful love, to become merciful in turn...inspiring us to love our neighbour."

The season of Lent in this Jubilee Year is a favourable time for us to listen to God's word and to practice the works of mercy. The Pope says: "In the corporal works of mercy we touch the flesh of Christ in our brothers and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, visited; in the spiritual works of mercy - counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer - we touch more directly our own sinfulness".

During these forty days of Lent let us look sincerely at how we live the works of mercy in our daily lives, and let us be active and enthusiastic about sharing these actions of charity and love, as disciples of Jesus. The Gospel is a message of joy and compassion, and even though Lent is a time of prayer and penitence, it should also be coupled with that inner joy which is manifest in our relationship with the Lord.

In Lent we reflect on poverty, not only in our own area but also the struggle of peoples throughout our world. Our Development and Peace support is an action of mercy and an outreach in a very concrete way, to help our sisters and brothers in developing nations achieve normal standards of living and growth. We also have been extending a hand of welcome to refugee families, helping them to feel safe and a part of our society. A true sign of God's mercy active in our hearts.

As we enter this holy season, let us in particular make it a time of true prayer and reflection, a time of true reconciliation and forgiveness, a time of deepening our understanding of mercy and sacrifice out of love for one another. Again Pope Francis notes: "the mercy of God is a proclamation made to the world, a proclamation which each Christian is called to experience at first hand." Thus our works of mercy help to proclaim the mercy of God in our struggling and suffering world.

May the Holy Spirit sustain us and increase our concern for one another, so that we can become more compassionate and always act with mercy towards one another. May our journey during this lenten period, increase our love, deepen our faith and strengthen our relationship with God and with one another. We ask Mary, the mother of the Lord, who recognized God's mercy in her own life, to pray for us. This will prepare us to celebrate with true joy, the Resurrection of the Lord at Easter.

Bishop Fred J. Colli