

DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON



LENTEN PASTORAL LETTER 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

My letter to you this weekend is to encourage you to join with me positively as we prepare to enter the season of Lent. This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, a day of fasting and abstinence. As ashes are imposed on our foreheads, we are reminded that we are dust and to dust we shall return. We are called to repent and believe in the Gospel.

In the readings at this Sunday Mass we heard that God never forgets us, that we are Christ's servants, and that we cannot be servants both of Christ and of money.

God never forgets us, and God never stops loving us. But do we really believe that? We can be all too conscious of failure, of weakness, and of sinfulness. Because of our lifestyle, the emphasis on money, and the pull all around us to forget God, we feel unworthy to be Christ's servants, and unable to open ourselves up to God's loving and forgiving embrace.

Yet, the Good News we are called to believe is that our God is a God of mercy and compassion. That is our faith, and that is what we should be reflecting in all that we do and say in our parishes this Lent. Sinners, like you and me, should feel welcome and given the confidence to turn back to God. Then we can celebrate happily the Sacrament of Penance and fulfil our Easter duties. Pope Francis speaks of generating "a culture of mercy". This is the task we can undertake in our communities this Lent as we make space for prayer, for acts of self-denial and almsgiving, and for reaching out to those in need.

None of us likes to be a failure whether we are a bishop or someone homeless on the street. Yet how many of us feel that we are failures even though we appear able to cope? That is why a "culture of mercy" is so important in your parish or school. Then we can accompany one another in turning back to Christ. We can be confident in inviting people on the edge of our family or of our community to join us on the constant journey of repenting and being converted.

In many parishes you will be accompanying and praying for people in the final weeks of their journey into the Catholic Church this Easter. But that is not the end of our life's journey, a journey that continues until we enter the kingdom of God.

So, we continue to pray for one another and accompany one another. That accompaniment includes supporting our priests in taking on responsibilities in the pastoral service of the community.

As you can hear, I am stressing God's mercy and the importance of supporting one another in our journey through Lent to the celebration of the Easter mysteries and beyond. May I urge you to be positive in your outlook this Lent and to give time to pray with real faith and with real belief.

There are obstacles to a positive attitude. One of those obstacles can be the news we hear or see or read. The media quite rightly calls us to account, and wrongs done in the name of the Church must be put right. But that necessary process can undermine faith and obscure all the good that you, the priests and people, do in the service of Christ. Keep going, trusting in the God who never forgets us.

So, as we prepare for the season of Lent, be positive and support and accompany one another and those on the edges that our faith in Jesus Christ, who has died and who is risen, may be deeply real and active, and attractive to those who do not know him.

Let us pray that, through a steadfast observance of Lent, we may gain pardon for sins and newness of life.

With every blessing,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a plus sign followed by the name 'Peter' in a cursive script.

Bishop of Northampton

*To be read and/or made available at all Masses of
the weekend of the 25/26 February 2017.*