



Lent 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Throughout the Season of Lent we hear a renewed call to embrace fasting and abstinence. These spiritual practices serve to remind us that the things of this world are passing and we are completely dependent on the Lord. This is a reminder we constantly need to hear, especially at this time of economic turmoil and financial concern in the life of our country!

In addition to the fasting and abstinence requirements of Church law, I strongly encourage you in this Season of Lent, with God's grace, to make a renewed promise to fast and abstain from "fear." Perhaps you may fear approaching the Lord with your sins, failings and weaknesses. Maybe you experience fear when you anticipate what the Lord may ask you to abandon. Fear may result as you begin to imagine a radically new life in Christ.

The call to abandon fear is constant throughout Sacred Scripture. It was the message of the angel to Mary. It was the message the Lord spoke to the disciples in countless circumstances and situations. The response to the call demands profound trust in the Lord and in His promise that He will be with us always.

If you respond to the Lord's call to abandon fear, you will not be afraid to acknowledge your sins. Instead, you will trust in God's infinite mercy and joyfully celebrate the Sacrament of Penance. If you abandon fear, you will not be afraid to let go of the things of this world that have a claim on you. Instead, you will rejoice in sharing your resources with the poor and needy. If you abandon fear, you will not be afraid to open your heart to God's plan for you. You will gladly welcome the new ways He invites you to serve as His instrument and gracefully embrace the blessings He wishes to bestow upon you.

Throughout Lent and always, pray daily for that grace to fast and to abstain from fear so that you can echo the words of the Psalmist, "O God, in you I trust. I do not fear" (Psalm 56). May Our Lord Jesus bless you abundantly in this Sacred Season of Lent, deliver you from all anxiety and fill you with His peace.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
Bishop of Raleigh



Norms and Guidelines for the Season of Lent – Diocese of Raleigh 2009

“Through our observance of Lent you correct our faults and raise our minds to you, you help us grow in holiness, and offer us the reward of everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Preface: Lent IV

The annual observance of Lent is the special season for the ascent to the holy mountain of Easter. Through its twofold theme of repentance and Baptism, the season of Lent disposes both the catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the Paschal Mystery. Catechumens are led to the Sacraments of Initiation by means of the Rite of Election, the Scrutinies, and catechesis. The faithful, listening more intently to the Word of God and devoting themselves to prayer, are prepared through a spirit of repentance to renew their Baptismal Promises. (Ceremonial of Bishops, 249)

Celebrations during the Season of Lent

The Sundays of Lent take precedence over all feasts and all Solemnities. Solemnities occurring on these Sundays are observed on the preceding Saturday. The weekdays of Lent have precedence over obligatory Memorials.

Devotional exercises which are traditionally associated with Lent, for example the Stations of the Cross are to be encouraged; they will help to foster the faithful's preparation for the celebration of Easter.

Accordingly parishes should offer more opportunities for communal prayer for the faithful, i.e. an additional scheduled daily mass, evening(s) of reflection, parish soup suppers, etc.

The Sacraments of Initiation

Because Lent is oriented toward the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter, care must be taken to maintain this central focus. Honoring the most ancient of customs, the Baptism of infants should not take place during Lent except for serious pastoral reasons or in the case of emergency. Infant baptisms during the Easter Season follow the traditional custom of the Church. As such, the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the reception of First Communion of the Holy Eucharist are to be rare and only by exception during Lent, but most appropriate during the Easter Season.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

It is laudable for the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be celebrated during Lent in a more solemn form, as described in the *Rite of Penance* (Ceremonial of Bishops, 251). The Diocese of Raleigh has a great and laudable tradition of paying particular attention to the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, especially providing for the celebration of the sacrament communally. The faithful should be clearly and positively encouraged to receive this sacrament during Lent. Pastors should devote themselves to the ministry of reconciliation, and provide sufficient time for the faithful to avail themselves of this Sacrament. The faithful should celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation before the Sacred Triduum begins.

Other Considerations

During Lent, the altar should not be decorated with flowers.

In the Dioceses of the United States, crosses in the Church may be covered from the conclusion of the Mass for the Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent until the end of the Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday. Images in the Church may be covered from the conclusion of the Mass for Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent until the beginning of the Easter Vigil. (GIRM, 318.3).

Music instruments ordinarily may be played only to give necessary support to the singing. Likewise, music should be chosen keeping in mind the penitential character of Lent and with the spirit of the season and its liturgical texts.

From Ash Wednesday until the Easter Vigil, the *Alleluia* is to be omitted in all celebrations, even on solemnities and feasts.

Encouragement is to be given to pray for the repentance and conversion of sinners, and this intention should be included regularly in the prayers of the faithful.

Marriages during the season of Lent are not to be encouraged. However, if a marriage does take place, there should be marked moderation in festivity. Couples should be instructed to use restraint when it comes to flowers in the Sanctuary.