

Pastoral Letter for Lent 2021

Lent is a time of conversion and a new beginning. We go with Jesus out into the desert, follow him on his way to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die for our salvation. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1) says St. Paul. Lent helps us to follow Jesus faithfully in word and action through all the challenges and difficulties of life. It is thus that we are able to receive the full joy of the Resurrection of Jesus. The pandemic has been a time of trial for many and is akin to Lent in many ways. We, therefore, look forward to Easter and the resurrection and the new life that Jesus will open for us. During this time, it has been very difficult for many not to be able to participate in church services. We are still not sure if it will be possible at Easter. We should consider this as a sacrifice of love in union with the sacrifice of Christ that will be fruitful for all those who are sick and suffering and who find it hard to come to terms with their situation. We must live in union with Christ, who took up his Cross for our sakes. *We pray for the sick, for those who are lonely and suffering, for all who are persecuted for their faith, for peace and justice in the world.*

Lent is a time when we focus totally on God and on what he wants to do for us and through us. “Do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31), says St. Paul. If we truly do this, then our difficulties and misfortunes have a deeper significance. We can then enter a deeper union with the crucified Lord and with his suffering members. More and more, we find our fixed point in him and we can live borne up by his grace. That way we receive the strength to come to the aid of all who are suffering and need help. Jesus wants to make use of us so that His love can reach those who most need it. *We pray for all those who only through us can experience the loving care of Jesus.*

Lent is a preparation for Easter. We must get rid of everything that weighs us down, all sin and ingrained selfishness, so that we can be free to receive the risen Lord and be transformed by his grace. We should examine ourselves in the presence of God to see what we need to be rid of. Jesus wishes to cleanse us from the leprosy of sin. He wants to say to each of us what he said to the leper: “I will; be clean.” (Mark 1:41). Confession, the sacrament of reconciliation is, therefore, a priceless gift, that some of us neglect or have never discovered. It can be difficult to feel true contrition, when differences tend to be levelled out, and at times it is difficult to distinguish between good and evil. We, therefore, need the discernment of the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Church to enlighten our conscience to see everything in the light emanating from Jesus. It is only then that we can step out of the old self and receive the gift of Easter: a new life in the risen Christ. *We pray for those who need this Light to convert to a life of faithfulness in imitation of Jesus.*

Lent is a time to live in solidarity with the poor and needy. We sometimes risk being suffocated by our abundance. Greed can kill our spiritual life. The worst thing is that we don't notice it but we take it for granted that we have the right to indulge in what we really don't need. The Holy Father recently said that our private property is meant not solely for us but it should give us the opportunity to share with those who need it more. What we save by fasting, abstaining from shopping, entertainment and other unnecessary

activities can help to alleviate the needs of those who are suffering. *We pray for those who are locked in the prison of greed and for those who are destitute.*

Lent is a time when we come close to Our Lady of Sorrows. Along with the whole Church we stand with the Virgin Mother at the foot of the Cross. We must try to perceive what it means for a mother to see her only child in agony and tortured to death. Our hardened hearts need softening so that we can become compassionate people, who are affected by the needs of others. No one can help us in this more than Our Lady, who is both our mother and Jesus' mother. We must look at Jesus through her eyes and become more open to Him. She helps us bear the unavoidable suffering that can strike us. With her help we can find the strength to continue when all seems dark and dismal. *We pray together with the Blessed Mother for all those who have no one to pray for them, for those who see life as meaningless and wish to end it.*

Lent is a time when we enter into the innermost mysteries of the Church. We live in an individualistic social climate. It is, therefore, important that we realise that we are members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. We live in union with Christ and one another. We belong to a holy people, who must support and help each other. The Church's pilgrimage through the ages is often burdensome and difficult. The pandemic has made this obvious to many. It is my prayer that many, nevertheless, have been strengthened in their faith and union with the Church at this time. It has been difficult to go to church and receive the sacraments, but hopefully many have learnt to long for them more. At the same time our unity as members of the Body of Christ has been severely tested. *We pray for Pope Francis, for unity in the Church, in our diocese and in our parishes that we will be strengthened in our faith that it is always Jesus Christ who leads the Church.*

Lent is a time of gratitude for everything that Jesus has done through his Cross and Resurrection. Through the Eucharist, that many greatly miss just now, Jesus offers to the Father a sacrifice of thanksgiving for us and for all creation. We must be a Eucharistic people who are permeated by gratitude for the mercy of God. *We pray that many will open themselves and receive the grace and love that only God can give.*

Stockholm, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul January 25, 2021
With my prayers and blessings,

+ Anders Arborelius ocd