



March 2, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In my visits throughout the Diocese, especially around Lent, I have sometimes heard it said that, “This Lent, I’m giving up ‘giving up.’” While this may be said humorously by Catholics and our Christian brothers and sisters this time of year, there may be some truth in these words. What if we give up on giving up? As we read in the words from Pope Francis, even through all the challenges and difficulties we face, the promise of Christ’s love and our salvation are sure to come if we are faithful and persevere. In essence, if we don’t give up.

“Let us ask God to give us the patient perseverance of the farmer (cf. Jas 5:7), and to persevere in doing good, one step at a time. If we fall, let us stretch out our hand to the Father, who always lifts us up. If we are lost, if we are misled by the enticements of the evil one, let us not hesitate to return to God, who “is generous in forgiving” (Is 55:7)...The soil is prepared by fasting, watered by prayer and enriched by charity. Let us believe firmly that “if we do not give up, we shall reap our harvest in due time” and that, with the gift of perseverance, we shall obtain what was promised (cf. Heb 10:36), for our salvation and the salvation of others (cf. 1 Tim 4:16).” (Pope Francis, Message for Lent 2022, para. 11)

On Ash Wednesday, we begin our 40 day journey to Easter and the celebration of Our Lord’s Resurrection. As we embark on our Lenten observances, and especially as we continue to work through the challenges of COVID-19 and witness the tragic violence occurring in Ukraine, let us reflect on these words from our Holy Father.

The Lenten journey gives us 40 days to focus on Christ, and to practice more intensely the disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We dialogue with Christ through prayer, listening to His words of comfort and guidance as we pour out our hearts. Fasting provides an opportunity to return to the stability and safe harbor of our authentic life of faith. All too often we find ourselves adrift on the sea of daily life, without direction and merely reacting to the myriad responsibilities and frustrations that storm down on us. Fasting gives us the grace of attaching ourselves again to Christ and to His Gospel, of returning to the true “rock of our salvation” (Psalm 95:1), anchoring ourselves in the harbor of the Church. And finally, through almsgiving, we are called to give back to the Lord in proportion to our means. This giving though is not only through monetary gifts. Works of service for parishes, Catholic schools, relief efforts, and with community groups are all forms of almsgiving. These acts are not only another means of bringing us closer to Christ, but also a visible witness to the charity of the Church and its people.

This Lent, let us use these 40 days to bring hope to others through simple acts of kindness, to pray for healing for the sick, to pray for peace and protection for our Ukrainian brothers and sisters, and to grow deeper in our faith so that we can live fully the blessedness and joy of our Baptismal dignity.

May God bless you this Lent and bring us renewed to celebrate the Easter Mysteries.

In Christ,

Most Reverend Ronald W. Gainer
Bishop of Harrisburg