



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

March 1, 2017
Ash Wednesday

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The season of Lent is now upon us. It is an opportunity to renew and deepen our relationship with Jesus, and to renew the choices we make, so that we might live as he taught. In fact, if we take seriously the Lenten program, it offers us the opportunity to renew our whole life!

Traditionally, Lent is a privileged time for *prayer, fasting* and *almsgiving*.

During Lent, we seek time *to pray more* – alone and with others. We might choose to read something that will nourish our spiritual life and lead us to more focused personal prayer. We might join our Parish community on Friday evenings for the Stations of the Cross; or we might decide to pray the Rosary as a family on certain evenings during the Lenten season. Many choose to attend Mass during the week with other parishioners.

When we *fast*, we usually cut back on what we eat and drink. Not only will this benefit us in a physical way, but it will also help us in our spiritual life. Fasting often leads us to understand that we depend on God to nourish us in every way. We will recognize the blessings we receive every day, which leads us to be ever more grateful and generous.

As a child, it was a practice in our family to “give up” something during Lent. One year I was courageous enough to give up watching television! It proved to be too difficult, and I confess that I cheated by watching one or two special television programs – in the mirror!!! The only person I cheated, in fact, was myself – knowing that I had failed in my Lenten resolve. The experience taught me that Lent is not about “my” tenacity, rather it is about God calling me always forward, always nearer!

“Giving up” something gives us time to “take up” something of greater value. Giving up social media for two hours each day in Lent could give time to read a book or two, or to write long-overdue letters to distant family members or long-forgotten friends. “Giving up” something might save us money to offer to a local food bank or other charitable cause. Even more, it might give us time to volunteer our talent to make life easier for others in some helpful way. That is *almsgiving*.

... 2/

It has always amazed me what can be done when everyone contributes even a little. One generous offering of time, talent, or treasure is something; many generous offerings can make a great a difference in the lives of those who live on the margins. For 50 years our own Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) has made an incredible difference for people in developing countries the world over by supporting projects that changed lives. Perhaps during this 50th anniversary year, we can increase our Share Lent offering to allow them do even more!

By prayer, fasting and almsgiving, our spiritual life is nurtured, our personal life is purified, and our outreach to brothers and sisters on the margins is encouraged. It is an effective Lenten program leading us to a deeper personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

I wish you a blessed Lenten season during which you learn how to live freely and fully in Him!

Sincerely in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

+Douglas Crosby, OMI

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI
Bishop of Hamilton

/cd