



OUR LENTEN JOURNEY

A Pastoral Letter for Lent 2010

My dear people of the Diocese,

When we gather for the Ash Wednesday Liturgy we begin the Lenten journey of 40 days that leads us to the Easter Triduum, the memorial of the passion, death and Resurrection of the Lord, heart of the mystery of our salvation. It is the time when the Church specifically calls us to repentance and renewal and invites us to have a keener awareness of the redeeming work of Christ and to live our Baptism in greater depth.

Over the weeks of Lent we can renew our recognition and acknowledgement of all that God has given us. When we pray and listen to the One who gives us life, when we seek God's face in prayer, we begin to understand how everything that we are and everything we have comes to us as gift and we can be deeply thankful. During Lent, the Church has traditionally expressed this through fasting, almsgiving and prayer.

LENT – TIME OF FASTING AND ALMSGIVING

Lent challenges us to develop an appetite and hunger for God, which is sharpened by whatever pattern of fasting we choose. This isn't just fasting for fasting's sake – that's not very helpful – but refraining from some of the good in our lives can lead to putting Jesus more and more at the centre, so that we can grasp hold of what is really important. The less we concentrate on ourselves and our own needs the more fasting, in its broadest sense, will help us to recognise the abundance of gifts we have in the life that God has given us. This in turn should lead to a challenging and generous using and sharing of all that we have – the giving of alms. It may mean giving money to the poor; it may be helping others by giving them time and love; it may be giving service in all sorts of ways to our parish or to our community.

“Project Compassion” provides us with a tangible means to focus on the practices of fasting and almsgiving throughout the forty days of Lent. In light of the terrible natural disaster that is Haiti and bearing in mind the many who have so little, I strongly recommend that you maintain the wonderful tradition of generous giving that has been established in our Diocese over many years in all our schools and parishes.

LENT – TIME OF PRAYER

The season of Lent calls us to give time to God to ponder, reflect and to pray. I don't mean time that's necessarily full of words and frantic activity. I mean quality time – and silence – when we can pray and listen to the Lord who gives us life. An age old practice of prayer which enables this to take place and which I wish to recommend to you all is the practice of “**Lectio Divina**”.

After the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2009, Pope Benedict said “ (Parishes) must be taught to listen prayerfully to the word of God through the practice of *Lectio Divina*, as the recent Synod of Bishops ardently hoped” The Pope also previously said, “I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God speaking, and in praying, responds with trusting openness of heart.”

Quite literally, *Lectio Divina* is Latin for ‘divine reading’, ‘holy reading’ or ‘spiritual reading’ and represents one of our oldest ways of promoting communion with God in recognising that each person has a discreet and distinctive relationship with God. The principles of *Lectio Divina* were expressed around the year A.D. 220 and practised by monks and nuns, especially the monastic rules of Saints Augustine, Basil, and Benedict. *Lectio Divina* has been kept alive by the monastic orders over the centuries and is re-emerging now throughout the world as a means of developing and sustaining an intimate relationship with God.

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So often when we pray there is a tendency to inundate God with our worries, our concerns, our desires. We have a task to do! We pray! We are goal focused people. Lectio, however, is about creating space to listen to what God is saying to each of us through the Scriptures. It is principally about relationship with God. The function of prayer, says Soren Kierkegaard, (a 19th Century Danish theologian), is not to influence God but rather to change the nature of the one who prays. We change through Lectio. We make time to listen to God, we make time to interact with the Word of God and reflect upon it, and we make time to rest in the presence of God. How can we not change?

Lectio Divina is essentially an individual way of praying which can be as brief as ten minutes in a busy day or a longer reflective period when time allows. It can be done anywhere, while travelling, while waiting for an appointment, in a lunch break. It can also be used as a method of group prayer.

Lectio Divina has four distinct phases:

LECTIO (*the reading of the Word*) - The slow reading of the text until a word, a phrase or a sentence ‘speaks’ to you, ‘jumps out at you’ or ‘touches your heart’;

MEDITATIO (*the ruminating*) - The gentle repetition of this word, phrase or sentence in a non-analytical way allowing it to sink into the core of your being;

ORATIO (*the praying*) - The prayerful response, taking the form of a deep conversation with God either through words or in profound silence;

CONTEMPLATIO (*the contemplating*) - The letting go of all thoughts, words and images, allowing yourself the stillness to be absorbed into God.

Father Luke Dysinger, O.S.B. tells us that “Time set aside in a special way for Lectio Divina enables us to discover in our daily life an underlying spiritual rhythm. Within this rhythm, we discover an increasing ability to offer more of ourselves and our relationships to the Father and to accept the embrace that God is continuously extending to us in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.”

IN CONCLUSION

This Lenten journey of faith on which we are setting out and which we share with so many others around the Diocese and the wider Church, will shape us as true and faithful disciples. The Lenten journey brings us to the face and heart of Christ and it is there that we truly find our way of proclaiming and being the Good News of the Kingdom. I urge you all to explore the richness of Lent through prayer – particularly the richness and simplicity offered through Lectio Divina, through fasting and almsgiving, so that we come to the celebration of Easter renewed in heart, mind and spirit.

May God bless you all.

+ Peter J. Connors

+ Peter J. Connors - Bishop of Ballarat

LECTIO for SEVERAL

1. **ONE PERSON READS ALOUD** (twice) the passage of scripture, as others are attentive to some segment that is especially meaningful to them.
2. **SILENCE** for 1-2 minutes. Each hears and silently repeats a word or phrase that attracts.
3. **SHARING ALOUD** A word or phrase that has attracted each person. A simple statement of one or a few words. No elaboration.
4. **SECOND READING** of same passage by another person.
5. **SILENCE** for 2-3 minutes. Reflect on “Where does the content of this reading touch my life today?”
6. **SHARING ALOUD** Briefly: “I hear, I see...”
7. **THIRD READING** by still another person.
8. **SILENCE** for 2-3 minutes. Reflect on “I believe that God wants me to today/this week.”
9. **SHARING ALOUD** At somewhat greater length the results of each one’s reflection. [Be especially aware of what is shared by the person to your right.]
10. **FINAL PRAYER** After full sharing, pray for the person to your right.

Note:

Anyone may “pass” at any time. If instead of sharing with the group you prefer to pray silently, simply state this aloud and conclude your silent prayer with Amen.

LECTIO for ONE

CHOOSE a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. Many choose the daily scripture reading from the Lectionary.

PLACE YOURSELF in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent.

THEN TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently listening for the “still, small voice” of a word or phrase that somehow says, “I am for you today.”

NEXT TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories and ideas. Do not be afraid of “distractions.”

THEN, SPEAK to God. Whether you use words or ideas or images or all three is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. And give to Him what you have discovered in yourself during your experience of ‘meditatio’.

FINALLY, SIMPLY rest in God’s embrace. Rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you in both words and silence.

REMEMBER:

This method of prayer can be as brief as ten minutes in a busy day or half an hour in a day of rest. Sometimes one will return several times to the printed text, either to savour the literary context of the word or phrase that God has given, or to seek a new word or phrase to ponder. At other times only a single word or phrase will fill the whole time. It is not necessary to assess the quality of one’s Lectio Divina as if one were seeking some goal: Lectio Divina has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.

