

This indifference that we sometimes exhibit as if we just live in our own world, is one of the greatest sins. The joy that the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings has the potential and the power to liberate us and change our Catholic Church in the process.

Our Church needs to change because we are the Church, which means that if the Gospel has truly changed us, then we can change the world and our communities for the better.

Begin then practicing these stated virtues but also be attentive to each other this Lenten Season. Look out for others whilst we are busily looking out for ourselves!

This Lent, let us follow Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life. If we do this then we will certainly change, and that's His promise.

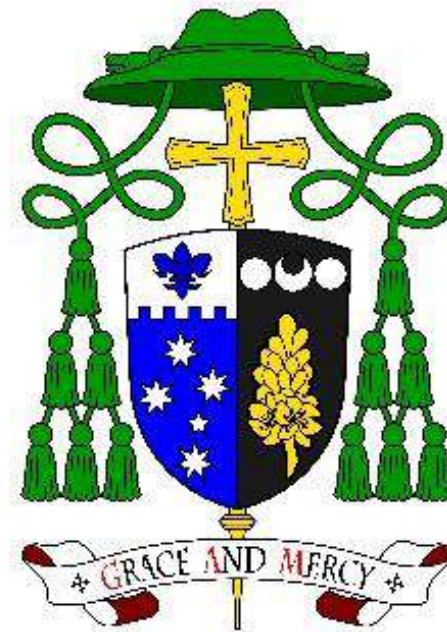
Wishing you God's abundant blessings,



MOST REV TIMOTHY J HARRIS
Bishop of Townsville

26 February 2020

LENTEN PASTORAL LETTER 2020



MOST REV TIMOTHY J HARRIS
Bishop of Townsville

My Dear Friends,

The Season of Lent has now begun. Ash Wednesday signalled the start. On that day we received the ashes from burned palms saved from the previous year and placed upon our foreheads.

This year especially I am conscious that we have experienced, perhaps from a distance, the devastating fires that have turned our landscapes into ashes. Much of Australia has burned and so much of our wildlife has perished as a result.

So ash is very much before us. By extension so too is death. The season that we have just entered is our time to go on retreat. By this, I mean that we take time to seriously reflect on turning away from sin (death).

This annual spiritual renewal prepares for the celebration of Christianity's most fundamental belief: Jesus was raised from the dead and is Christ, the Lord. Lent therefore has no meaning in itself.

Lent prepares us for Easter and new life. Our "little" deaths are necessary as is our final death, but the truth is, Easter has the final word where death is concerned.

In terms of our own preparation for Easter, I would like to suggest that we take some time to identify what needs to "die" in us so that the new life of Easter can come.

Traditionally, fasting, prayer and abstinence has been our practice as ways for us to prepare for Easter. Fasting has to do with the quantity of food eaten and abstinence refers to the kind of food denied oneself, for example, meat. These practices certainly prepare for the feast to come.

But we need to do more. Fasting and abstinence by themselves can make us grumpy or on edge if not embraced within the context of prayer. We need to remind ourselves that the more challenging action to take is in fact to reflect on how we treat others.

Hardness of heart indeed is the worst kind of sin (death) where we sometimes aggressively dismiss others because of their colour, ethnicity, social status, or even because they vote for a political party different to our own.

One would hope that in this period of prayer, fasting and abstinence, our attitudes will change in a whole host of areas based upon the gospel and message of Jesus Christ.

As we go "into the desert" with Jesus this Lent, hopefully by the end of it we will be able to hear him say to us: "You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone".

For the evil one will tempt us too. Jesus does not succumb to the evil one, unlike ourselves. Jesus instead dies for our sins and by this action He shows us how to live. With God's grace, freely given, our living can be worthy if we but surrender to Him.

So we can add another "virtue" to this year's Lenten retreat that you and I have just begun. To fasting, abstinence and prayer, we can include "surrender". "Surrender" to the God within. This is the time to go to the heart of the Season but as St John Chrysostom once said: "No act of virtue can be great if it is not followed by advantage for others. So, no matter how much time you spend fasting, no matter how much you sleep on a hard floor and eat ashes and sigh continually, if you do no good to others, you do nothing great".