



Diocese of Worcester  
Office of the Bishop  
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Lent 2017

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

Pope Francis has recently reminded us that “Lent is the favorable season for renewing our encounter with Christ...” From his first encyclical to the present day, by word and deed, the Holy Father has shown us that the hearts of those who truly encounter Jesus Christ are filled with the joy of the Gospel. Our lives, our Church, nation and world need that joy. We all need that renewed encounter.

Pope Francis has also warned us that sin can cool, distance and even break our relationship with Christ leaving us not with joy but with an interior emptiness, a weariness about life and a blindness to our true needs and the needs of those around us.

In urging us on to conversion, the Holy Father challenges us not to settle for mediocrity but to use the Lenten practices of prayer, penance and almsgiving to draw closer to Christ, detach ourselves from the false idols of this world and to accompany more closely those in our midst who are suffering, needy and vulnerable. Pope Francis invites us this Lent to hear and ponder more deeply the word of God. He particularly directs us to the parable of the rich man who dressed extravagantly and dined sumptuously each day while the poor man Lazarus lay unnoticed at the rich man’s gate.

While we may not consider our clothing extravagant or our daily fare sumptuous, the Gospel challenges us to look through the eyes of the poor in our midst and beyond. Can I live more simply? Do I really need all I have or plan to acquire? Am I putting more emphasis on my wants rather than my needs and the needs of others?

A recent news article reported that psychologists have found that people derive more satisfaction and pleasure from providing things for others in need rather than acquiring something unnecessary for themselves. In Gospel terms, “whatever you do for the least of your brothers and sisters, you do it for me.” Our charity and almsgiving become an encounter with Christ that brings us joy. Prayer and penance help us to take our eyes off ourselves and to see others in our midst. They liberate us to respond and, in doing so, to find joy. This is the journey of Lent--- taking up the Cross, dying to self that we may better love God and others. It is a journey that leads to the joy of Easter.

I pray that you may take this journey seriously and that, through the grace of God, it will lead you to a renewed encounter with Christ and a deepened awareness of the joy of the Gospel.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus  
Bishop of Worcester