



By Bishop Joseph N. Latino

On Wednesday, March 9, with the distribution of blessed ashes, we began the solemn penitential season of Lent. Lent is traditionally the time when we are invited and encouraged by the liturgy to join Jesus in His journey to Jerusalem. It is the preparation time to anticipate Easter and Christ's victory over sin and death. It is a time individually and collectively for all of us to be transformed by the mercy of God, through the death and resurrection of His Son.

Most often Lent is associated with the idea of depriving oneself of legitimate pleasures or recreation. Frequently our personal concept of Lent is defined by the things we decide to give up, and not so much by the things we choose to do. To willfully decide to abstain from food, drink or legitimate entertainment is indeed a form of penance and praiseworthy, but it is not the only valuable penance we might choose.

Lent is a time for each of us to think positively, not just negatively. Lent is a time to choose to do more, not less. It is a time to make right whatever is wrong in ourselves. It is an opportune time for each of us, through soul-searching, to come to a better knowledge of ourselves and our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Lent is an excellent time to seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, especially if we have not done so for a long period of time. This sacrament affords us the opportunity to examine our lives and once again do something positive by seeking forgiveness and mercy.

Receiving the Eucharist, the source and summit of spiritual life, more often, especially if we have neglected to do so lately, is a positive turn for Lent. This holy season truly is a great time to pray more and worship more by reciting the rosary, participating in the Way of the Cross, attending a weekday Mass if possible and immersing oneself in the Gospel passion narratives.

Lent is also a wonderful time to love more and forgive more. Offering alms to charity, volunteering in local initiatives for the poor, reconciling with someone who has hurt you, reconciling your own faults with the Lord by making a good Confession are integral parts of the journey through Lent to Easter.

All of these actions are positive, spiritual and symbolic bonds with the Lord during Lent. Our late Holy Father John Paul II of happy memory, in one of his Lenten messages said: *Penance is not just an effort, a weight; it is also a joy....The whole period of Lent, since it is a preparation for Easter, is a systematic call to this joy that comes from the effort of patiently finding oneself again. Let no one be afraid to undertake the effort.*

May this positive approach to this Season of Lent be the grace occasion for all of us to become what God created us to be. As we enter into this journey let us make it a time to do more, not to settle for less. If we live this Lent in a manner that deepens our relationship with God, it may not be an easy time, but indeed it will be the best of times.