



NATIONAL CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

CENTENARY HOUSE, NEAR TETTEH QUARSHIE INTERCHANGE

Tel: +233-0302-500491/0302-976222

E-mail: president@cbcgaha.org/
secretarygeneral@cbcgaha.org

P. O. Box KA 9712
Airport - Accra
Ghana/West Africa

2021 LENTEN PASTORAL LETTER OF THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (GCBC)

Theme: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

Preamble

Our dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, on the occasion of this year's Lenten Season, we, your Bishops, bring you fraternal greetings of peace and blessing. We wish to invite you, our dear brother Priests, Religious Men and Women, and Lay Faithful, and indeed, all Christians and men and women of good will resident in our country, Ghana, to join us to render thanks to God for another Season of special grace and to pray fervently in the next forty days for the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lent: A Season for Renewal

Lent is a Season of God's special grace for personal and collective renewal. It is a time to retreat from conforming to worldly values and aspirations, and to allow the Spirit of God to renew our minds and hearts, so that we may discern what is the will of God (cf. Rom. 12:2). Indeed, the Holy Spirit does not only initiate Christian renewal, for He also sustains and brings it to fruition in what is good, acceptable and perfect (cf. Rom. 12:2).

In the renewal animated by the Holy Spirit, we may have a “desert experience”. Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the gospel reading of the first Sunday of Lent, models for us the desert experience which is inspired by the Spirit (Mk. 1:12-15). Jesus is led by the Spirit to enter the desert or wilderness, a place of prayer and solitude (Mk 1:12). The wilderness as the place of Jesus' forty-day sojourn is particularly significant for three reasons: Firstly, it is the place of physical deprivation, an indication of the need for the human person to seek detachment from the over-reliance on material things. Secondly, it is a place of solitude and of silence, the ambience which predisposes the human person to listen, as Israel did, to the voice of God who revealed his commandments in the wilderness of Sinai. Thirdly, it is a place of divine providence. It is in the wilderness that God will miraculously provide the needs of his people, feeding them with manna and quenching their thirst with water from a rock (Ex 16 – 17).

It is for the same reasons that in Lent the Church invites all of Christ's faithful to embrace the three acts of renewal – namely, fasting cum abstinence, prayer and almsgiving. By restraining ourselves in the use of material things the Church invites us to a greater detachment. By solitude and prayer, she invites us to open our hearts ever more generously to hear the Word of God and dispose ourselves to obey it. Thirdly, imitating God's solicitude for Israel in the desert, the Church urges us to hearken to the cries of the poor and the needy, through acts of kindness.

Lent in the midst of COVID-19 Pandemic

Last year (2020), due to the Government's directives aimed at curbing the spread of the infections of the coronavirus and minimizing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, congregational celebrations were suspended in the middle of Lent; and as things turned out, we could not gather to celebrate the most Holy Week of Easter. This year also, we have the opportunity to begin Lent with congregational celebrations. While we pray for God to bring an end to the pandemic, let us observe at all times all the directives on COVID-19, especially whenever we gather in our various Churches. Let us endeavour to do our best in the Church, at home, school, market-places, offices, workshops, etc. so that we can climax this year's Lent with the communal celebration of the Holy Week.

The coronavirus is not a creation of God nor could its pandemic be a scourge of our God who is so loving that He offered His only begotten Son for our salvation (cf. Jn 3:16). Nonetheless, in the light of the above-mentioned "desert experience" of our Lord Jesus Christ, we could see the COVID-19 pandemic as a "spiritual desert experience." Firstly, as a desert is the place of physical deprivation, so the COVID-19 pandemic has deprived millions of people across the world and thousands across Ghana of food, shelter, jobs, health, etc. By so doing, the pandemic teaches us that no material thing is eternal; no material thing can be relied on forever, as "man shall not live by bread alone" (Mt 4:4). So, while we seek material things to sustain our physical existence, we should place our priority right: "seek ye first the kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness ..." (Mt 6:33).

Secondly, as mentioned already, the desert is a place of solitude and of silence, the ambience which predisposes the human person to listen, for "man shall ... live ... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). Similarly, as a spiritual desert, the COVID-19 pandemic re-echoes the voice of God which we have ignored because we feel we are capable of managing our affairs or the world without its Creator.

Thirdly, as said already, the desert is a place of divine providence. So, like the Israelites who realised their insufficiency and cried to the God of providence for water and food, the spiritual desert of COVID-19 should make us humbly fall on our knees and cry for deliverance from the pandemic.

Lent: A time to Reconcile with God

Lent is a special time to reconcile with God and the pandemic beacons us to more readily do so. Fortunately for us, God is the Initiator of our reconciliation and His mercy has no limits. Here, we should be encouraged by the insight of Pope Francis who says that "Mercy is the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to us. God has always had a special affection for humanity" (cf. Ps 8) so much that even after Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 3), He purposefully and progressively showed mercy to reconcile us to Himself. Throughout the Old Testament, God presents Himself as "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relents in punishing" (Joel 2:13), "One who takes delight in the vindication of His children" (Isa 62:1), and "One who cannot forget His children" (Ps 137:5-6).

Lent offers us the perfect opportunity to tap into the unfathomable mercy of God that reconciles us with Him. It is a season that opens our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. Let us, therefore, make time to go for confession.

Lent: A time to Reconcile with Humanity

Our reconciliation with God is incomplete without reconciliation with our fellow humans. Thus, the Lord enjoins us: “if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 6:15). We are, therefore, exhorted during the season of Lent to promote sincere spirit of reconciliation between all categories of people: the bishops and their collaborators, among priests and religious, religious leaders and their members, chiefs and their subjects, political leaders and their followers, among political parties, employers and employees, spouses, parents and their children, and within families. As we enjoy the mercy of God, let us endeavour to be merciful to others (cf. Lk 6:36); let us open our hearts to all people - our families, friends, brothers, sisters and even our enemies - wounded by our words, actions and/or omissions.

The mercy which is at the core of reconciliation with others also entails helping those in need. Therefore, reawakened in conscience by the Spirit of the Lord who wants us to see Him in the needy (Mt 25:40), let us feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead, counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently with those who do us ill and pray for the living and the dead (cf. the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy and the Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy). These are more profound means of reconciling with one another.

Lent: A time to Promote Justice and Peace

There can be no true reconciliation where injustice persists. We, therefore, have to promote justice on the personal and national levels. Justice in turn fosters peace, which is a tranquility of order in accordance with the will of God. Thus, peace and justice are inseparable. Lent offers us the opportunity to constantly examine our consciences to find out if we have been guilty of acts of injustice, so as to undertake appropriate actions to achieve justice and peace in our communities. Let us, therefore, work towards a peaceful nation by acting justly and promoting justice at all times.

Lent: A time to Reconcile with Nature

Lent also offers us the time to reflect on some of our actions that harm our natural environment. Human beings connect with nature in various ways: “... our bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters...” (Laudato Si’, #2). The earth is our common home. Yet, we have inflicted harm of various kinds and degrees on our natural environment by our irresponsible use.

We have plundered our environment recklessly through indiscriminate dumping of rubbish and industrial waste, ‘galamsey’ activities, logging, deforestation, water pollution and other forms of ecological degradation.

Let us resolve to implore God's mercy for those sins against creation that we have not hitherto acknowledged and likewise commit ourselves to taking concrete steps towards ecological conversion, which requires a clear recognition of our responsibility to ourselves, our neighbours, creation and the Creator. Let us treat our environment the very way we will treat ourselves since a healthy environment makes us healthier and happier.

Conclusion

Beloved, we wish to conclude by reiterating that Lent is a special Season of renewal and that the COVID-19 pandemic is a call for global renewal. Our renewal is first and foremost with God the Creator and Redeemer, who is calling us to have a sincere reconciliation with our fellow humans as well. Such a reconciliation should be characterized by the true justice which promotes peace. Finally, let us relate with the rest of nature with the character and skills of the stewardship which accords with the supreme will of our Creator.

We wish you all; a Spirit-filled Lenten Season in which our minds, hearts and souls are truly renewed!

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Most Chaste Spouse of the Holy Spirit, intercede for us all!

God bless us all and our homeland Ghana!



MOST REV. PHILIP NAAMEH
METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP OF TAMALE &
PRESIDENT, GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2021