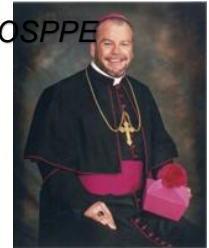




Most Reverend Columba Macbeth-Green CSPPE
Lenten Pastoral Letter for 2018



Lenten Reflection

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Season of Lent has come around again! For many of us Lent is a time for giving up something we like as a penance, listening to long Bible readings at Mass from the Old Testament, hearing a lot about Repentance and Sin, and of course, the Churches are light on flowers and decoration but heavy on the purple.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that *in Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert.*

"Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil." (Luke 4:1)

Lent invites us to journey with Jesus, into the desert. It is there, in that place of spiritual struggle, the field of engagement, where we can learn the root causes of our challenges and be equipped with the spiritual armour to defend against what the Scriptures and Tradition refer to as "the world, the flesh and the devil." The "world" in this sense does not refer to the Created order. Creation is good and given to us as a gift. Rather, the "world" in this context refers to some of the attitudes and behaviors in daily life which have squeezed the primacy of the Creator out of central focus. When we succumb to the "world's" seduction we give ourselves over to the idolatry of self and God is on the periphery instead of at the centre of our lives.

The "flesh" referred to in Scripture is not our body as such, which God created good and which is destined for resurrection, glorification and eternal life. Rather, the "flesh" refers to the disordered appetites which are one of the effects of sin at work within us.

The "devil" is not some figment of our imagination, but a real and malevolent presence. Satan is 'the master of lies', the 'master of deceit'. The story of the fallen angel points to the reality of evil in our world and reminds us that we are always engaged in a struggle to resist the temptations to deceive and be deceived. Just as 'the master of lies' tempted our first parents – Adam and Eve - and later tempted our Lord, we too are tempted. These 40 Days of Lent are a testing time in which we learn to conquer "the world, the flesh and the devil" so as to live differently, beginning now. This liturgical time of Lent renews our spiritual lives and prepares us again to remember who we are and who our God is. We wake up to those things which lead us away from God, we become aware again of those things that distract us from loving our Lord with all our heart. We turn away from the lies and the counterfeit in our lives and reach again for deeper and more authentic life in Christ.

I suppose you could say that in a way, Lent is a time for some spiritual pruning! Just as we cut off the lifeless and unwanted shoots in our gardens, Lent allows us the opportunity to strip back the dead and useless aspects and attitudes in our lives. We seek not to sin; we try not to be attached to those things which are not of God. We let go a little of some comfort and false security and loosen our grip on unnecessary possessions, so that we may remember again who we are and how much we are loved. We experience anew the fact that God alone can fulfill our deepest longings and our deepest needs and we recognize all over again that we have been duped by the 'master of lies' in our pursuit of true happiness. Maybe we have been tempted by the desire for pleasure for its own sake, maybe we have been conned by our own egos to believe that power and dominance over others will bring happiness, maybe our faith has been shaken and we are tempted to believe that God is no longer there or no longer cares. During Lent, we begin the process of

purifying and cleansing our spiritual lives all over again. It is a time to wake up to the need to be vigilant.

This year the Church herself has had what we all recognize as a 'wake- up call' of tragic and monumental proportions. We have had the summary report from the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse. Too many individual Priests, Religious and Bishops have sinned gravely and too many others have failed to expose the truth for far too long. As an Institution, we have clearly failed to live in a way that reflects the beliefs we hold dear. The Commission drew us out into the desert and faced us with the truth of what has happened to some of the most innocent and vulnerable in our communities.

This Lent we have much to reflect upon. This Lent we face the need to turn back and repent and ask for forgiveness and get things in order so that horrendous crimes like these against children never happen again. The Royal Commission has shed some light in some dark corners of our history. We now have an opportunity to be transformed by this Commission. We have been given a chance to see how thoroughly some amongst us have failed and how thoroughly some leaders have failed. It shows us how weak we humans are and how sin can corrupt people, even good people, when not resisted

This Lent, as the Church as Institution reflects on the evil that was allowed to triumph, each of us in our own way should do what we can within our own spiritual lives and within our communities to draw nearer to God and to support all our people to focus on Christ and resist all efforts of Satan to distort and corrupt. The Church needs us now to be vigilant on her behalf as well. Those who have been hurt need our support and prayers. We ask for forgiveness and commit to making straight the path into the future.

I commit to doing all I can to nurture a new culture of awareness and integrity and call on you to help me. The Church needs our prayers. Priests, Religious and Bishops need our prayers. May we this Lent not deny the reality of evil and do all we can to resist its influence in our lives.

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