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ARCHBISHOP'S MESSAGE FOR LENT 2017

Dear Friends,

“What are you giving up?”

We all know Lent is approaching when we start to hear this question!

This Lent let us all remember that Jesus challenges us personally in three special areas; **prayer, fasting and almsgiving.**

This Lent I recommend we all make some simple commitments.

Prayer: This Lent how can each of us strengthen our relationship with Christ? What will help us get to know the Lord better?”

One simple suggestion is to spend an extra fifteen minutes at night slowly reading, praying and reflecting on the daily Gospel. It isn't a great sacrifice but it really helps. Pope Francis reminds us that The Word is a gift” – he stresses prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Another simple practice is for each of us to seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance. I encourage you all to make a good confession before Easter, even if it has been a long time. Rightly, the Pope says: “Sin blinds us.”

In the early Church, they called confession the 'second conversion in tears.' Saint Peter wept in sorrow after denying Jesus, and in his mercy Christ spoke to him the tender words of his pardon and peace. In the sacrament, we too can hear these words of compassion for our sins.

And then there is **Fasting!** As we make our small acts of fasting and as we 'give up' food, drink or whatever, let us never forget it isn't all about what we do individually...

Giving something up for Lent is not an end in itself. It should readily redirect our attention from ourselves toward others.

Saint Augustine commenting on fasting and mortification once said: “Don't believe that fasting suffices. Fasting punishes you, but it does not restore your brother. How many poor people could be nourished by the meal you did not take today?”



Saint Augustine reflects the words Isaiah wrote centuries earlier: “Is not this the sort of fasting that pleases me - to share your bread with the hungry?”

Self-denial frees our mind and our resources. What money or time we do not spend on ourselves, we need to spend for the benefit of others

Almsgiving: And that is the heart of the issue – giving something up during Lent requires us not only to think about the needs of others, but to do something to meet those needs

While both prayer and fasting could be seen as being all about us, almsgiving is oriented toward the good of others. Who can you help this Lent?

Pope Francis constantly emphasises this connection between self-denial and charitable outreach. Lent rescues us from ourselves and frees us to think about others – particularly those who suffer from poverty. Supporting the wonderful work of Caritas by contributing to Project Compassion is one great way.

Another small act of ‘almsgiving’ could be giving people some of our valuable ‘time’. . Pope Francis says: “The other person is a gift; urging us to welcome and love life, especially when it is weak and vulnerable.”

Why not consider visiting and spending some real quality time with people who are sick or elderly in your parish? Or reach out to some recently arrived refugees in your area by your welcoming presence with them. Our increasingly fearful, polarised and selfish world desperately needs to see the witness of Catholics who welcome the ‘stranger.’

This Lent 2017 I pray and hope that your Lenten season is filled with many spiritual gifts.

May all of us here in the Archdiocese of Melbourne; **pray, fast and give alms.** May we never forget to ask ourselves: “How can I share with my neighbours in need?”

+ Denis J. Hart,
Archbishop of Melbourne.