



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

## Pastoral Letter: Lent

*Bishop Peter Doyle, Northampton*

PASTORAL LETTER, FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT, 9 MARCH 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last Sunday Jesus challenged you and me with the words “You cannot be the slave both of God and of money”. The challenge is about the choices we make about what comes first for me. Does Sunday Mass come first or last on my weekend to do list? Am I as passionate about what is true and what is just as I am about the football team I support? Am I fostering my child’s faith as much as their academic or sporting progress? Has God a place in my home? Have I time to pray, to do penance, to help those in need?

On this first Sunday of Lent Jesus is challenged to make choices by the devil. Led into the wilderness by the Spirit, Jesus fasts for forty days and forty nights. Far from being weakened, he is strengthened in the contest with the devil. He resists temptation. He makes the definitive decision to do his Father’s will, a decision that will lead to the cross and to the resurrection.

I am praying that these days of Lent may be a time for us to be strengthened in our inner life, in our hearts and minds and souls, to combat the temptation and sin highlighted in today’s readings.

Because we lead busy lives, we chill out in front of the television or the computer. I waste so much time playing solitaire! Together we have the opportunity to move out of our routines and out of our comfort zones, fasting from distractions and giving time to prayer and opening our eyes to the needs of people around us. I think that the sense of us not just doing something on our own but together is important. We do penance for our own sins and for our failings as the Church.

I would like us all in our parishes and pastoral areas, people and religious, deacons and priests, to come closer together, seeking ways to live our Catholic life more faithfully, and to touch the lives of family and friends who are no longer active Catholics or who know nothing of Jesus.

Just as the call to repent is addressed to each of us individually as sinners, it is also addressed to us as communities wherever there is a need for forgiveness and healing. The fallouts within and between communities can be a great scandal. If that kind of situation touches you, now is the time to do something about it. It means reaching out. It means being vulnerable. It involves the pain of change for the love of God.

We also need to prepare the way together for difficult decisions about when and where Mass is celebrated as the reduction in the number of priests begins to bite.

The community at each Sunday Mass is precious but it can also be inward looking and restrictive. Would Mass with another Sunday Mass community at another time and perhaps in another place reach out to others? Are we as individuals and communities bridges or barriers to Jesus?

At the beginning of this letter I wrote about the challenge Jesus faced in the wilderness and about the challenge to us about what comes first in our own lives. To help us and to encourage us there are people up and down the Diocese who have made big choices to be baptised or received into the Church at Easter. Pray for them. Welcome them. Integrate them into the family of the parish.

Above all, this season of Lent is a season of the abundance of divine grace given to us freely through Jesus Christ for eternal life. Let us give thanks to God the Father for this time of grace. Let us ask him to cleanse our hearts and strengthen us in love through the Holy Spirit. With confidence, let us repent and let us be faithful to the Gospel.

Yours devotedly,  
+peter  
Bishop of Northampton