



**Lenten Message 2009**  
**from the Most Reverend Bishop Robert C. Morlino**  
**Bishop of Madison**  
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Dear Friends,

We once again find ourselves in the holy season of Lent. And each year, we are all reminded of our need for increased prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, during this penitential time. We will, no doubt, make the Sacrament of Confession a priority and avail ourselves of Lenten activities in our parishes. Fish fries, simpler meals, giving as a family to Operation Rice Bowl and other sacrifices will become part of our routine for the next forty days. These are things which are almost “automatic” for us as Catholics after Ash Wednesday, and the rest of the world has come to know our Lenten practices rather well. And this is all very good. I would like to use this week’s column to offer some extra thoughts on which to reflect and perhaps a few specific recommendations, as you consider your Lent this year.

First, why do “give things up” for Lent? Why do we assume new or extra disciplines during this season? Well, it isn’t intended merely as penance for our sins. We deny ourselves, our desires, and even our needs, so that God can increase in us. Our Lenten sacrifices must bring us toward Christ, and toward holiness.

Throughout Lent ask yourself: Will my sacrifice help me grow closer to Christ and, through Him, to my neighbor? Am I allowing Christ’s presence in my life to increase, as I deny myself? Or, is my penance making me impatient and short tempered? Is my own penance becoming an imposed penance on the people I come into contact with each day? We each need to take note of where we are on Ash Wednesday, where we are each day of Lent, and where we should be this Easter Sunday.

All our Lenten disciplines, those things we give up and those things we take up, must serve to convert us toward God and His will. Any discipline which doesn’t serve this purpose is fruitless and should be rethought.

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, will begin his Lenten retreat next week. He, and his closest co-workers, will spend a week of intense prayer, following the rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours and will be offered three meditations by Cardinal Francis Arinze, on the theme of “The Priest Encounters Christ and Follows Him.” Each evening, they will have Eucharistic adoration and benediction. While we cannot have a private retreat lead by Cardinal Arinze, we could each emulate the Pope’s simple outline, for some period of time this Lent. Prayer and meditation on more closely following Christ,

especially before the Blessed Sacrament in adoration will do so much good for those of us who choose to do so. Likewise, it will effect good in your families, our diocese, our country and our whole world.

Young people have a unique opportunity in our diocese this year. This March (20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>), I invite all young people, ages 13-30, to join in the *Youth 2000* retreat, here in the diocese. The Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Renewal, from the Bronx, and the Community of St. John, from France, will direct what promises to be a truly awesome weekend retreat, centered around the Eucharist. It will be filled with opportunities to grow in your faith, friendships and most importantly with, and in, Christ, through private prayer, adoration and the Sacrifice of the Mass. If you fall in that age range, please consider coming. Young people are certainly not exempt from the discipline of Lent. And I am certain that so many times you feel as if you are searching for “something.” I ask you to consider spending this weekend with some excellent people who are trying to help you find what it is (who it is) that you are looking for. And parents and grandparents, please forward my invitation onto your children and grandchildren. I’m told more information is available on the website.

The Church, throughout the world, continues to celebrate the Year of St. Paul, “a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). In your own way, you are each called to proclaim the Gospel as Paul did, in your families, with your friends, by your example, and even publically. We can all consider if, and how, we are living out our call to be disciples of Christ and to spread His loving truth, right here in the 11 counties of the Diocese of Madison this Lent.

And more specific to our Lenten meditation, we could use this Pauline year to consider seriously and pray about the strength of our courage, perseverance and discipline as followers of Christ, in light of his letters/life. In the letter to the Hebrews (3:13-15), it is written “Encourage yourselves daily while it is still ‘today,’ so that none of you may grow hardened by the deceit of sin. We have become partners of Christ if only we hold the beginning of the reality firm until the end, for it is said: ‘Oh, that today you would hear his voice: Harden not your hearts’...” And of discipline (in Heb 12:11), “At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.” This is why we discipline ourselves during Lent, that what we learn during Lent might be lived out the rest of the year, and hopefully the rest of our lives. As a priest friend of mine calls it, “Lent is spring training for the soul”, training for sainthood.

As I examine my own Lenten journey and my own path toward holiness, I find the example of Mary and all the saints particularly helpful. They serve as proven models of holiness for us to emulate. Our call to holiness is just that – a call to become a saint. We can study the saints’ lives, read their writings, and ask their intercession. Their example teaches us that we must give up our pride and not be afraid to ask for help. We require the help of God Himself, and the intercessory aid offered us by the saints in heaven and our loved ones here on earth. We cannot save ourselves. We must constantly ask God for His grace, and His generous forgiveness when we fail Him.

Lent should compel us to say “I firmly resolve, with the help of thy grace, to amend my life.” The saints made this resolution to holiness and are with Him today. Our saying “no” to ourselves this Lent, should translate into saying “yes” to God. Each Lent we are called to recommit ourselves to Christ, in the hope that the seeds planted in the springtime of Lent will grow into the sustainable fruits of holiness and true communion with Christ and one another.

These are only a few ideas and reflections to keep in mind during this Lent. Your priests and parishes, throughout the diocese, will offer many other Lenten programs, events and opportunities to grow in holiness. I thank them for all they do for you. I have asked my office to post these items on the diocesan website as well, in as much as it is possible, for your information.

Thank you for reading this, have a blessed Lenten season and God bless each one of you.  
Praised be Jesus Christ!