

**In the Heartland
With Bishop Pates**

**LENT – Springtime of the Soul
And
The Attraction of the Good**

LENT UNDERWAY

Among the best attended Church services of the year is Ash Wednesday. It is not a Holy Day of Obligation nor necessarily attached to a primary feast of our salvation. But Ash Wednesday connects with the innate spirit deep within human nature. We know that we have been given abundantly and been recipients of God's love. Yet we have failed. We feel a great need to acknowledge our failure and reconnect with this generous God.

Ash Wednesday is not a one-time experience but rather an introduction to an extended period of time to repent, to turn away from sin and believe and act in accord with the Gospel.

The Church in its wisdom and experience proposes three practices that support our efforts at repentance during the season of Lent.

- 1) We are called to prayer. Prayer connects us in a personal way with God enabling us to enter into his mind and heart and thus transforming us into his life. We call this holiness. One valuable practice of prayer is to read and meditate on a short passage of Scripture each day allowing that message to seep into our hearts so God's Word becomes the source of influence for our actions.
- 2) We are called to fast. In fasting from physical nourishment, we become aware of God's presence and the invaluable strength he provides for our soul. It helps us become attentive to the hungers of our spirit that only God can satisfy.
- 3) We are called to almsgiving. Pope Francis has emphasized the responsibility that we have for taking care of the poor. We need first to attend to the poor with our personal gifts – kindness, tenderness, attention. We share the gift of ourselves. Secondly, we are

to exercise charity to assist the poor with material resources – not from our excess but from our need as the parable of the poor widow who gave of what was essential to her situation – manifesting genuine sacrifice. Secondly, projects in the diocese that merit our combined efforts are: the Nigerian collection on behalf of the Holy Spirit Fathers Juniorate Seminary in Ihiala, Nigeria. This seminary educates future members of the community of priests four of whom currently serve in the Diocese of Des Moines. The other is the Rice Bowl Collection benefiting Catholic Relief Services, the outreach arm of the Catholic Church in assisting relief, development and peacemaking in poor countries throughout the world.

The eventual outcome of these three practices is to activate repentance. This, in turn, means that through our ongoing transformation we will promote a world view that emanates from abiding “in Christ.” It leads to managing our time so that our family, work, spirituality, intellectual life and those with few resources and opportunities find a place in our lives in a healthy, balanced manner.

The Attraction of the Good

Recently, I gave a presentation to the Catholic Studies Program at St. Louis University. The title was “The American and Catholic Response to Global and Local Conflict.”

As Americans, we are fortunate to live in the wealthiest and most developed country in history. In terms of our relationship with less fortunate peoples, it calls for the utilization of our resources for the benefit of others. Hopefully, this would lead to development and peace and the enhancement of human dignity everywhere.

The Catholic perspective contributes the notion that every human person is created by God with an inherent dignity which calls for respect. As Pope Francis constantly reminds us: We are one human family, all sisters and brothers. As we address conflict, we are called to do so with principles derived from the Gospel.

During the question and answer period, a young co-ed from India and of the Hindu religion raised the question: “But who is the opposition to your presentation?” In effect, who could hold a position contrary to what seems patently oriented to the good?

It is a good question and the response is those who hold a different world view, who look at life from an insular perspective in a manner that is basically self-centered. Hopefully, in our very actions, exercised humbly but with conviction, we might engage others – the opposition so to speak – in the Gospel of love and bring about God’s expanding embrace of all.