



**ARCHBISHOP SHANE B. JANZEN  
PRIMATE OF THE TRADITIONAL ANGLICAN CHURCH**

**MESSAGE FOR LENT 2024**



St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: “Sorrow for sin is indeed necessary, but it should not involve endless pre-occupation. You should dwell also on the glad remembrance of the loving kindness of God.”

As we enter the holy Season of Lent, our thoughts turn inward; not in any narcissistic way but in self-reflection, self-examination, and self-improvement. Lent is a spiritual journey back to God. In the Book of the Prophet Joel, God calls out to His people with a message of longing and love:

"Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love...." *Joel 2:12-13.*

That call from God to the Chosen People of Israel so many centuries ago is also His call to us, His Church, the new Israel, in our own time. It is a universal call to repentance and renewal. A call to turn away from self and turn back to God.

One of the sacred songs I like to listen to during Lent is called *Hosea*, in which we hear the moving words from Scripture of God's invitation to fallen humanity: “Come back to Me, with all your heart.”

The invitation to come back to God with all our heart is not easy to accept. The next line of the sacred song says, “Don't let fear keep us apart.” Fear can be a barrier to embracing God's plan for our lives. Fear can prevent us from following Christ fully in our life. But the barriers, the reluctance to commit, the defenses we set up, are not just founded on fear; they can also be based on self-will and our desire for self-determination.

With a degree of humour borne of reality, Saint Augustine astutely wrote: “Lord, give me chastity...but not yet.” Writing of the human heart, the human soul, St. Augustine was echoing what so many feel and fear when it comes to our relationship with God. “I want to come to you, Lord, but not fully, not completely, not with my whole my heart. Maybe just a little bit, maybe some more in time, but not all the way. There are some things in this life I'd rather not put aside.”

Part of the invitation of Lent is to focus on what it is that makes it difficult for us to fully embrace God's invitation to come back to Him with all of our hearts. We are called in this Season to ask ourselves: "Where is my hesitation? What am I worried about giving up? Is there fear in my hesitation? What am I so attached to in my life in the here and now that in returning to God I fear may be taken away? Is it doubt that holds me back? Is it sin that holds me back? Is it a lack of love or faith that holds me back?"

In light of these very human questions, know this: God is patient; God is merciful; God is loving. His desire is for our salvation; our happiness; our well-being. He desires for us abundance of life. A life and a future which we can only imagine. And all we need to do is take that one step toward Him; to utter the words of the man healed by Jesus: "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."

St. Bernard of Clairvaux reminds us that contrition for sin is necessary and important in making our way back to God BUT he also reminds us that we "should dwell also on the glad remembrance of the loving kindness of God."

Our sin, our failings in our faithfulness to God, must not paralyze us to the pardon and mercy of God. We must not allow fear to replace faith in our relationship with God. Our present circumstance must not blind us to the future God holds out for us. And the things of this life must not distract us from the fullness of life God has in store for all who believe in Him.

Christ came to cast out fear. Christ came to call us back from sin and death to life and love. Lent is not only a season of penitence and self-reflection but also a season of prayer and renewal as we return to God with all our hearts.

On Ash Wednesday we recall from where we had come; that 'we are dust and unto dust we shall return'. But even in the reality of our present state, God does not leave us as dust nor see us as dust but as one with His divine Son in His humanity.

As in the Garden of Eden, so now through Christ, God breathes life into our dust, restoring our immortal souls to His divine image.

The journey back from sin, fear and self-determination amidst a world scarred by hatred, division, and death is but a change of direction – a turning into the loving embrace of God.

Through this Season of Lent, may each of us experience the love and longing for the Lord which calls us back to Him; leading us to the joyous celebration of Easter!

*+Shane*