

CONVERSATIONS WITH ARCHBISHOP J

Renewing our Baptismal call



Q: Archbishop J, What is the inner meaning of Lent?

Lent is a time of renewal—either a time of preparation for Baptism or recommitment to our baptismal call. For those being received into the Church this Easter, this is your first Lent, your first time of preparing for that amazing day when you will be joined with us in union with Christ.

For us who are baptised this is a wonderful time to reflect on the mystery of salvation and what God has done for us in Christ. **What is the significance of your Baptism?**

The Constitution on Sacred Liturgy (109) reminds us of the twofold character of Lent—Baptism and penance. Lent is an extended preparation for Easter, for receiving the catechumens into the Church. This is why it is also an intense time of penance. We are either preparing for Baptism or we are renewing our baptismal call through this time of prayer, penance and almsgiving. This is about regeneration, renewal and conversion of heart.

Pope Benedict XVI in his *Message for Lent 2011* said: “In fact, the Church has always associated the Easter Vigil with the celebration of Baptism: this Sacrament realises the great mystery in which man dies to sin, is made a sharer in the new life of the Risen Christ and receives the same Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead (cf Rm 8:11). This free gift must always be rekindled in each one of us, and Lent offers us a path like that of the catechumenate, which, for the Christians of the early Church, just as for catechumens today, is an irreplaceable school of faith and Christian life. Truly, they live their Baptism as an act that shapes their entire existence” (1).

Our Lenten Practice

If Baptism and penance are the double focus of Lent, then our Lenten penance is about renewal of our baptismal promises. This is foundational to being a disciple of Jesus.

During Lent we intensify our prayer, fasting and almsgiving to renew our commitment to living our Baptism. Each of the elements acts in its own way in our soul to lead us to a deeper relationship with Christ. The three together forms a unity to connect us directly to Christ and God’s will so we may more earnestly focus on God who is Creator and author of all.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1438) says: “*The seasons and days of penance* in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church’s penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance,

voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).”

40-day Challenge

This year I invite you to enter on the path to renewal with our Archdiocese through Hymns, Homilies and Hospitality. This 40-day challenge will afford us a specific path to renewal, a way of reflecting on our own Baptism and deepening our commitment to its call.

Hymns as prayer and fasting: Speak to one another “with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit,” says St Paul. “Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19,20).

Could we use sacred music for Lent—all of Lent? Fast from secular music and entertainment and spend that time in prayerful disposition with sacred music? Download a playlist of sacred music, contemporary and classical.

Let us change the music we listen to this Lent. By changing our music, by consciously using sacred text for listening during this Lenten time, we can renew our sense of the mystery we celebrate and receive with some depth the invitation of God to us during this Lent. Why not regularly post on Facebook the music to which you are listening so we can inspire one another.

To change the music is to connect with God and prayer in a different way, to discern what reverberates with your soul and moves you to prayer. It is to continually raise your mind and heart to Christ. At church, sing! Yes, open your mouth and praise God with the music at Mass and enter into the Liturgy in a deeper way this Lent.

Homilies as prayer and renewal: The Sunday Gospels will be a rich source of reflection for the Lenten journey. Each week, read the Gospel for the Sunday in the *Lectio* style. Read it and reread it. Ponder it and probe it. Pray with the text till it yields its fruit.

Jesus’ entry into the wilderness this Sunday helps us understand temptation and free will. In subsequent weeks we will be reminded of Abba’s particular love for each of us, hear His invitation to return home and be assured of His extreme mercy. The reading of the Passion in Holy Week will give us the whole perspective of the events we celebrate in this most holy week.

Prepare for Mass by delving deeply into the readings, let God speak to you through them. Prepare yourself to listen to the homily, to engage the Word that Christ is speaking.

Hospitality as almsgiving: “Do not forget to show



Archbishop Jason Gordon participates in the First Friday Stations of the Cross in Beetham Gardens on March 1.

hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it” (Heb 13:2).

Hospitality is at the heart of the mystery of Baptism. God welcomed us into His family when we did not deserve it. Further, He called each of us His child. He gives us gifts without measure for our good and for the building up of his Church. All of this is God’s hospitality.

How will we respond? This Lent let us look at our response to others. Are we generous and kind? Are we welcoming and open to others? Or, do we judge and write off people?

In your family, workplace and Church look at the hospitality gaps. Reach out and welcome others, especially those who are picked on, or shunned by others. If we have become part of God’s family, we need to live hospitality.

This is the inner meaning of our Baptism and a major path to renewal. Read the pastoral letter of Archbishop Emeritus, Joseph Harris on hospitality. Journey with it during this season of renewal.

KEY MESSAGE: Lent is a path to renewal of our baptismal promises. This year let us enter into renewal through Hymns, Homilies and Hospitality.

ACTION STEP: Choose a person, family or institution to give alms this Lent. That is hospitality to God.

SCRIPTURE READING: Eph 5:19–20; Mt 25:42–46