

## *BISHOP BAMBERA'S LENTEN MESSAGE – 2019*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent, is typically the one day within the liturgical year that rivals Easter and Christmas, with throngs of people flocking to our churches despite the fact that there is no obligation to attend Mass. Faithful come to worship, to pray and to be so marked with the sign of the cross that all who encounter them know who they are as followers of Jesus – our crucified and risen Savior.

It's fair to say, however, that while the rituals and words of Ash Wednesday remain the same as they always have been, this year is different. The Church in the United States – and beyond – has been through a year of tremendous suffering, upheaval and frustration as it has confronted the reality of countless numbers of allegations of sexual misconduct and cover-up by Church leaders. Some Catholics have stopped going to Church altogether because of this scandal. And those who remain undoubtedly have had their faith tested and their confidence in the Church's ministers shaken.

But Ash Wednesday and Lent, by their very nature, carry with them opportunities like no other time within the Church year. With a focus upon conversion, forgiveness and the new life that we are given through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, our participation in the journey of Lent – from Ash Wednesday to Easter – has the power to renew our spirits and strengthen our hope. Indeed, this unique journey provides us with a framework within which all of us can affirm that while heartbroken because of the reality of sin within our midst and in our lives, this is still *our* Church. And this Church – this community of saints and sinners – is still the visible body in and through which Christ is present and at work among us.

This year, more than ever, Lent beckons each of us to stand in awe of God's merciful love and to utter words that we would be wise to offer every day of our lives, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of life" (*John 6:68*).

During this blessed season, our parishes will provide numerous opportunities for prayer and reflection. Of note will be the creation of a special *Stations of the Cross* through which we will pray for the healing of victims and their families and for the renewal of all our lives as believers in Jesus. To provide for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a generous manner, once again, all of the parishes of the Diocese of Scranton will participate in *The Light Is On For You*. Every Monday evening during the Lenten season, beginning on the first Monday of Lent, March 11, and continuing through Monday of the last full week of Lent, April 8, confessions will be heard in every parish from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

For many of us, the question of "what's next" in the Church has arisen more than we would likely care to admit. Yet, we must never forget that it is in and through the life of the Church that our faith is most fully nourished. This same Church still remains our surest hope for salvation and peace, not because we have earned it or deserve it, but because of the grace of God and the call freely given to each of us through Baptism to live as disciples of Jesus.

May our embrace of this holy season enable us to glimpse into the mystery of God's plan for our salvation. Choosing to allow his merciful love and forgiveness to shine forth within the Church – this all too human body of believers – God continues to call each of us to “go forth” and to never lose sight of the mission entrusted to our care: to bring life to the world through our faith in Jesus Christ.

Wherever we fit into the Church – as a family member, parishioner or leader – may we support one another during this difficult moment in our history and so discover the true reason for our hope as we journey together to Easter.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.  
Bishop of Scranton