



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

February 17, 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, has given us a moving and insightful Message for this Lent. It can be found on the Vatican website, www.vatican.va. He begins with St Paul's affirmation, "*The justice of God has been manifested through faith in Jesus Christ.*" He then unpacks the meaning of justice which for most persons means what one person owes to another. But he places that into a bigger picture in which we see human efforts at justice within the broader world of our relationship with God as the measure of our relations with one another. Such a vision allows us to confront the reality of injustice and evil on a level that we could not have without seeing our lives within the wondrous and awesome reality of a God Who created us in love, established us with the gift of freedom and calls us to live that freedom by choosing the good over all the various concrete possibilities and real distractions of evil and of injustice.

The Holy Father repeats the words of Jesus Himself that "*there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile... What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, from the heart of man come evil thoughts.*" It is the evil that infects the human heart, the evil that springs from a mean heart that wounds him as it wounds others and wounds our relations with God and with one another. The Old Testament justice that comes from God is one that seeks to bring about the liberation of the human heart. This comes in fullness when Jesus mounted the cross to free us from sin and bring us into a restored and renewed relation to God and one another. This is "the justice that comes from grace" that goes beyond any human concept of justice because it is the fruit of the "exorbitant price" God has paid for liberation, the price of the death of His own Son.

We then must be the ever grateful recipients of a justice that is divine, that liberates, that forgives, that gives new life that flowers into gratitude, reconciliation, forgiveness and unbounded charity. Clearly what has been given to us we must then give to others, that same understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation, love and peace.

My dear friends, this Lenten message I wish to make my own for each and every one of you. And I desire to make this message of the Holy Father very concrete by applying it to a situation that I believe is too prevalent in our Church today, one that has infected too many of us and threatens to poison our very life as Christ's Church on Long Island. I am referring to how much we seem to be always attacking one another, feeling free to speak ill of one another, even slandering those with whom we do not agree. How can we who have been forgiven by Christ not offer forgiveness and respect, love and peace to one another? If from out of our mouths come anger and bitter condemnations of our brothers and sisters, of priests and bishops, with little or no concern for objective truth and human dignity, then we have closed ourselves off from the liberating love of Jesus Who from the cross begged God to forgive even His murderers.

It would mean so much to me as your bishop and your pastor, your spiritual father and your friend, if all of us together would make a part of our Lenten journey a commitment to the message of the Holy Father and seek to build up the Body of Christ by affirming all that is good in one another. Then we can come to the Sacred Triduum and the glory of Easter with hearts lifted up by gratitude to God, by appreciation of one another and by a loving kindness that is charity, that love which is His gift to us and which is the sole way for us to live in harmony, happiness and peace.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Bishop of Rockville Centre