



## LENTEN MESSAGE 2008

***Our appreciation of God*** - Lent is already upon us. It seems that only yesterday we were ringing in the New Year with resolutions and reviews. The most significant event of 2007, according to the media, was the appreciation of the dollar increasing close to 20%. In view of this, I said to myself, "If only our appreciation of God could match the appreciation of the dollar, perhaps then, we would be *at par* spiritually, by the end of 2008."

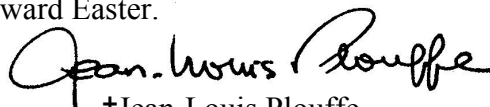
To attain this goal, we need to pay greater attention to God and acknowledge our need of forgiveness for our shortcomings. The prime time for growth in our awareness of God's presence in our daily lives as well as a true appreciation of His love, is upon us this new Lenten Season. We are invited to give God all the attention He deserves in order to see Him as He is, free from the images of God so often blurred by our own self-centeredness.

The best course of action, for growth in our awareness of God's love at all times and in all circumstances, is described in the teachings of Jesus found in Ash Wednesday's reading from the Gospel of Matthew. We are reminded that the only almsgiving, prayer and fasting that are pleasing to God are those done in secret – these are rooted in truth and love. ***Almsgiving***, as the concrete way to respond to our neighbour's needs is also an exercise which frees us from attachment to worldly goods (*Pope Benedict XVI*). ***Prayer*** is an experience of our spiritual poverty where we contemplate God's all powerful and merciful love that dwells within our hearts (*John of Kronstadt*). ***Fasting*** from our appetites, both physical and spiritual, helps us to loosen the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, and to share our bread with the hungry (*Isaiah*). To deepen and strengthen our union with God, we must focus on Jesus and live this Lent as a time of expectation from the One eager to renew us from within.

If we truly take on the challenge of letting go of our excesses and pay more attention to our God, we will realise that His love for each of us will lead us to a greater understanding of our need for forgiveness. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was devoted toward those capable of welcome and response. He never sought to destroy the broken reed, but to heal and restore it to life. God never abandons us in our guilt, provided we admit to our wrongdoings. He is always prepared to offer His grace in order that we may rise again when we fall in our sin. When our guilt overwhelms us we can choose to ignore and minimize our faults, or we can humbly turn to Him, admit our shortcomings and experience freedom from our guilt through His mercy and forgiveness.

The sacrament of Reconciliation leads precisely to the ever surprising forgiveness of God. His mercy and grace are always greater than our sins. Perhaps we think that God is tired of hearing us confess the same sins repeatedly which we find rather tedious. God does not think like us. He loves to forgive because he knows us and He desires the very best for us. He only awaits our confession so he can lift our interior burden and pursue the loving plan He holds for each of us. He longs to restore us to the dignity and joy which manifests the strength and fidelity of His love. Thus, God's forgiveness will not only be a source of liberating freedom, but will enrich us because our love for Him will be more genuine. It will achieve its fullness in His pardon and peace.

God is always present when we know how to look for him. We need only to be attentive in order to see Him in the slightest light shining in our lives, to know that He is present in our moments of darkness. We will never lose sight of His compassion. This very small effort on our part, if constant, will help us grow in our daily appreciation of God especially as we journey toward Easter.

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