



March 3, 2025

Feast of Saint Katharine Drexel

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On Wednesday, March 5th, we begin our sacred journey of Lent. The ashes we receive on Ash Wednesday are a reminder to “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.” These 40 days call us to reflect on our lives and our relationship with God. Lent invites us to prepare our hearts and minds for the glorious celebration of Easter, reminding us of the transformative power of repentance from sin and the call to remember and serve others.

I encourage you to engage in the traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Fasting in Lent helps us to literally make more space and time for God in our lives during this time. While fasting to lose weight can be beneficial for your health as well, there are other ways we can fast: perhaps we could introduce periods of time to fast from television or social media. Fasting can help us to better understand the relentless misery of those who are not giving up eating as a choice; they simply have no food. In a world that tells us that we should indulge ourselves, fasting tells us something different. In my own spiritual exercises for Lent, I have found it helpful to offer my fasting, prayers, and almsgiving for specific intentions so as to remind myself that their focus should be both on my love for Jesus, who died on the Cross for all of us, as well as for the good of others. This year I am offering my Lenten Disciplines for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life within our Diocese; for world peace, especially in the Ukraine and Gaza; for the victims and survivors of human trafficking; and for distressed migrants and refugees in our country and throughout the world. I suggest that you consider offering your Lenten Disciplines for these intentions as well, or for specific charitable intentions of your own.

There is a Greek word that is a perfect definition of the Lenten journey; that word is Metanoia. It means “turning back.” In Lent we turn away from our worldly distractions, and back toward God. We strive to become more like Jesus while helping others, particularly those most in need, to achieve the same. To assist us with this goal, I especially encourage you to go to Mass at least one extra day during Lent, to pray the Stations of the Cross, and especially to make a good confession. In the words of Pope Francis: “While God is firm in his call for conversion, he is always waiting to receive the sinner with open arms. ‘The God of mercy; he does not tire of forgiving. We are the ones who tire in asking for forgiveness, but he does not tire’” (Daily Mass Homily, March 28, 2014. See also *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, N.3).

We can also reflect even further on the theme of our Jubilee year – Pilgrims of Hope. As pilgrims of hope, Lent is an opportunity to focus on the virtue of hope. We can all find hope in God who is always with us. There is much sorrow and uncertainty in the world and in so many peoples' lives, particularly the poor, the lonely, the forgotten, and the marginalized. Whether found on the streets or abandoned in a nursing home, each is still a child of God worthy of our attention. As Pope Francis reminds us: "Sisters and brothers, thanks to God's love in Jesus Christ, we are sustained in the hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rom* 5:5). Hope is the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul (Catechism of the Catholic Church n.1820)." It moves the Church to pray for "everyone to be saved" (*1 Tim* 2:4) and to look forward to her being united with Christ, her bridegroom, in the glory of heaven. . . . May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope, intercede for us and accompany us on our Lenten journey."¹

As we journey through Lent together, may we embrace this opportunity to reflect on our sins and receive God's merciful forgiveness while also finding ways to remember and serve those in need, particularly in our own communities. In the spirit of this holy season, I invite you to join me in prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and service. Through remembering and serving others we can bring the hope found in Christ to our neighbors.

My prayer is that we will be open to the grace of God in these days of Lent. When Easter comes, may we all have grown closer to God, so that, as devoted Christians, we will more visibly reflect the image of Jesus in our lives.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Timothy C. Senior". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg

¹ Francis, "Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2025," *Vatican*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/20250206-messaggio-quaresima2025.html> (accessed February 25, 2025).