
PASTORAL LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS

My brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

The pattern itself of the Gospel readings appointed by the Church for the Sundays of Lent instructs us as to the meaning of Lent. Following a venerable tradition, the gospel for the first Sunday of Lent is always the account of Jesus in the desert and His victory over temptations to sin. As Jesus emerges from the desert to begin His public ministry, the first word He speaks is “repent.” The original Greek term is “metanoiete,” perhaps more expressively translated as “turn around.” In the Gospel reading for the Second Sunday of Lent, the account of the Transfiguration of the Lord, the Church turns our attention to the destiny of all who heed the call of Christ. As Jesus reveals His glory as the Son of God before the three chosen disciples on Mount Tabor, He also reveals the glory that will be ours if we follow Him faithfully with love and conviction. To attain to this glory is the purpose of our Lenten observances. On the succeeding Sundays of Lent, the Gospels meditate on the meaning of the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus entered our human reality not only to reveal God to us, but to reveal us to ourselves, to reveal our dignity as persons made in the image and likeness of God. This dignity, often marred by sin and obscured by forgetfulness, is restored through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the promise of abundant and everlasting life, the source of true happiness and peace.

Such a proclamation of hope is the proper context for my message concerning a scourge that is afflicting our society and culture – that of drug addiction. This addiction has already taken thousands of lives throughout Ohio and in our nation. It is important that we face this plague with concern, understanding, involvement, and commitment. Several offices of the Diocese of Columbus, including Social Concerns, Catholic Schools, Religious Education, Youth and Young Adults, Marriage and Family Life, and Communications, have cooperated with community leaders in establishing a task force to gather information, to provide resources for help in overcoming addiction, and to develop strategies for eliminating the causes of addiction. These resources will be made available to all the parishes and all the faithful of the Diocese of Columbus. They will

be helpful in understanding this crisis, as well as directing people to the agencies offering assistance in overcoming addiction, and providing every parishioner with resources by which we can all help to face this challenge.

The challenge is a large one. To be candid, we live in a narcotic culture which seems to teach that the purpose of human life is pleasure and entertainment. It is a culture that often defines the worth of human persons in terms of their productive value and their usefulness, rather than their inherent dignity.

The Church has a unique role to play in this effort. We proclaim the power of God through Jesus Christ to overcome threats to human dignity. We announce the true destiny of all human life. Through the grace of God, we can turn from sin to a new life. We need not be kept in bondage to failure and addiction. Following the example of Christ, we teach a way of life that brings a true happiness, a way in which we are able to face difficulties with hope and to work for the common good with conviction.

We must be ready to accompany with concern all those in need. Our overriding message should be one of compassion, a readiness to assist, a commitment to strengthening the bonds of family life and community support, and a promise of new hope and a future worthy of human dignity. Our church can assure those affected by the drug crisis that they need not ever feel alone.

Please avail yourselves of the resources that have been assembled by the Diocesan task force, to be found through your parish or directly from the diocesan offices.

I earlier spoke of the first announcement of Jesus’ public ministry. It was a call to repentance or “metanoia,” “turning around.” The forty days of Lent are a gift to us by which we can more completely follow this command of Christ and prepare ourselves to enter into the glory of Easter. With the help of God, we can diminish this drug crisis and turn lives around by offering to our culture a new way of living, filled with promise and true happiness. We can become companions with those who need assistance along this path of hope.

Most Reverend Frederick F. Campbell
Bishop of Columbus
