

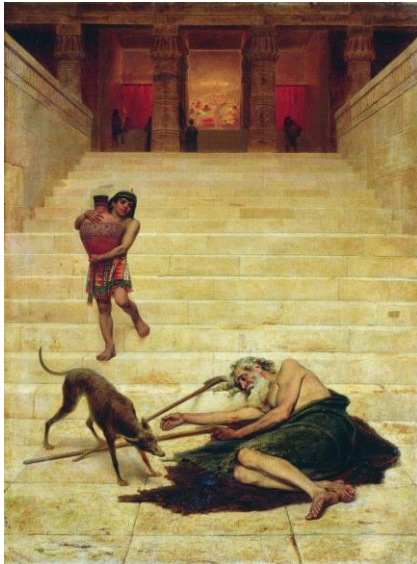


DIOCESE OF VARANASI

F U L L N E S S I N T R U T H

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Lazarus at the rich man's gate

Lent is a favourable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and almsgiving

My dear Fathers, Sisters and Brothers,

Grace, Mercy and Peace of Christ Jesus our Risen Lord !

1. Lent is drawing near, inviting us to repentance and conversion of heart. The call to repentance is to return, to turn around with greater openness to the Word of God and re-enter the place of truth. It is a favourable time to return “with whole heart...fasting and mourning” (Joel 2:12) to the Lord, your God who “will pour spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 3:1). It is the most opportune time to “approach the throne of grace, so that we will obtain mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb 4:16). Christ, the eternal Son of God, comes so close to us in our weakness that we can return to him without fear. The openness of Adam to admit his true condition (Gen 3:9-10) and stand before God, vulnerable as he was, enabled him to have the joyful discovery that God is truly “compassionate, rich in kindness” (Joel 2:13).

During this holy season, God invites us to receive forgiveness. His offer is unconditional, completely empty of self-seeking. Receiving forgiveness requires a total willingness to let God do the healing, restoring and renewing within us. When God emptied himself, taking on human nature in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:7), he did it to be among people who need forgiveness, among us sinners, and to take upon himself the burden of our sins. He chose to comfort us, to save us, to free us from our misery.

Apostle Paul states that by His poverty we were set free (II Cor 8:9). “This is God’s way of loving us; what gives us true freedom, true happiness is the compassion, tenderness and solidarity of his love. Taking flesh and bearing our weaknesses and sins, “God reveals His infinite mercy towards us” Pope Francis.

Through the Lenten practices of prayer and self-denial, we aspire to re-enter the house “where the Father dwells and reaches out to his children – the touch of his hands, radiating inner light, seeking only to heal”. This is the God I want to return to: “a Father who, from the beginning of

creation, has stretched out his arms in merciful blessing, never forcing himself on anyone, but always waiting, hoping that his children will return so that he can speak the words of love to them and let his arms rest on their shoulders. His only desire is to bless” (H. Nouwen).

Holy Father Pope Francis offers very inspiring reflection in his message for lent and exhorts us to renew our encounter with Christ and take on the journey to sincere conversion. He draws our attention to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) to emphasize that “the Word of God is alive and powerful, capable of converting hearts and leading them back to God”. He encourages the faithful to pray that “the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion, so that we can rediscover the gift of God’s Word”. I request all to benefit from the full text attached herewith.

2. 24 Hours for the Lord: Holy Father invites the whole Church to observe this on Friday-Saturday preceding the IV Sunday of Lent, ie: 24-25, March 2017. Pope advises to include the Sacrament of Reconciliation in order to afford “the opportunity of experiencing the liberating power of forgiveness” (MM. 11). Every parish will please pay serious attention to do the needful.

3. Shantidham Ashram will hold annual **Charismatic Convention** from 03-05 (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) March 2017. Similarly Yesudham will hold convention from 24-26 March 2017. These will be opportunities for deeper spiritual renewal during Lenten season with special focus on the Word of God. Kindly encourage the people to benefit from it.

4. Our Clergy Recollection will be on 05th and 06th (Wednesday and Thursday) April 2017 beginning at 09.30 am on 5th. The Chrism Mass will be at 5.30 p.m. on 05th April. Kindly bring your holy oil vessels in **well-cleansed** condition for receiving the new oils.

5. The **Priestly Ordination** of our Deacons Andrew Masih, Balaswamy, Brayn Barel, Manoj Kispota and Michael Rajan, will be held on April 20, 2017 at 9.30 a.m. at St. Mary’s Cathedral, Varanasi. Your prayers and spiritual support for the deacons are solicited. All are invited for the ceremony.

6. I request all the principals/headmasters/boarding incharges to take timely action to ensure **new admissions of Catholic children** to school as well as boarding.

7. I earnestly request all to plan in advance the **Summer Camp**, paying attention to the syllabus, the team of Fathers, Sisters, Teachers, Catechists, etc. Including some creative activities and teaching aids will make the programme enjoyable for boys and girls. Summer camp must be seen as common concern of the parish and should get due priority over personal interests.

8. We must **motivate students** to attend summer school of music and dance, BA in Nav Sadhana Kalakendra, GNM in St. Mary’s Varanasi and Fatima, Mau. Some guidance and preparation for entrance test will certainly help them.

I assure my special prayers for each of you during the Lenten Season.

Yours in the Lord,



+Eugene Joseph
Bishop of Varanasi

Encl: 1. Pope’s Lenten Message
2. Diocesan Lenten Regulations

Pope Francis's message for Lent 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a new beginning, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter, Christ's victory over death. This season urgently calls us to conversion. Christians are asked to return to God "with all their hearts" (Joel 2:12), to refuse to settle for mediocrity and to grow in friendship with the Lord. Jesus is the faithful friend who never abandons us. Even when we sin, he patiently awaits our return; by that patient expectation, he shows us his readiness to forgive (cf. Homily, 8 January 2016).

Lent is a favourable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. At the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply. I would now like to consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (cf. Lk 16:19-31). Let us find inspiration in this meaningful story, for it provides a key to understanding what we need to do in order to attain true happiness and eternal life. It exhorts us to sincere conversion.

1. The other person is a gift

The parable begins by presenting its two main characters. The poor man is described in greater detail: he is wretched and lacks the strength even to stand. Lying before the door of the rich man, he fed on the crumbs falling from his table. His body is full of sores and dogs come to lick his wounds (cf. vv. 20-21). The picture is one of great misery; it portrays a man disgraced and pitiful.

The scene is even more dramatic if we consider that the poor man is called Lazarus: a name full of promise, which literally means God helps. This character is not anonymous. His features are clearly delineated and he appears as an individual with his own story. While practically invisible to the rich man, we see and know him as someone familiar. He becomes a face, and as such, a gift, a priceless treasure, a human being whom God loves and cares for, despite his concrete condition as an outcast (cf. Homily, 8 January 2016).

Lazarus teaches us that other persons are a gift. A right relationship with people consists in gratefully recognizing their value. Even the poor person at the door of the rich is not a nuisance, but a summons to conversion and to change. The parable first invites us to open the doors of our heart to others because each person is a gift, whether it be our neighbour or an anonymous pauper. Lent is a favourable season for opening the doors to all those in need and recognizing in them the face of Christ. Each of us meets people like this every day. Each life that we encounter is a gift deserving acceptance, respect and love. The word of God helps us to open our eyes to welcome and love life, especially when it is weak and vulnerable. But in order to do this, we have to take seriously what the Gospel tells us about the rich man.

2. Sin blinds us

The parable is unsparing in its description of the contradictions associated with the rich man (cf. v. 19). Unlike poor Lazarus, he does not have a name; he is simply called "a rich man". His opulence was seen in his extravagant and expensive robes. Purple cloth was even more precious than silver and gold, and was thus reserved to divinities (cf. Jer 10:9) and kings (cf. Jg 8:26), while fine linen gave one an almost sacred character. The man was clearly ostentatious about his wealth, and in the habit of displaying it daily: "He feasted sumptuously every day" (v. 19). In him we can catch a dramatic glimpse of the corruption of sin, which progresses in three successive stages: love of money, vanity and pride (cf. Homily, 20 September 2013).

The Apostle Paul tells us that "the love of money is the root of all evils" (1 Tim 6:10). It is the main cause of corruption and a source of envy, strife and suspicion. Money can come to dominate us, even to the point of becoming a tyrannical idol (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 55). Instead of being an instrument at our service for doing good and showing solidarity towards others, money can chain us and the entire world to a selfish logic that leaves no room for love and hinders peace.

The parable then shows that the rich man's greed makes him vain. His personality finds expression in appearances, in showing others what he can do. But his appearance masks an interior emptiness.

His life is a prisoner to outward appearances, to the most superficial and fleeting aspects of existence (cf. *ibid.*, 62).

The lowest rung of this moral degradation is pride. The rich man dresses like a king and acts like a god, forgetting that he is merely mortal. For those corrupted by love of riches, nothing exists beyond their own ego. Those around them do not come into their line of sight. The result of attachment to money is a sort of blindness. The rich man does not see the poor man who is starving, hurting, lying at his door.

Looking at this character, we can understand why the Gospel so bluntly condemns the love of money: “No one can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money” (Mt 6:24).

3. The Word is a gift

The Gospel of the rich man and Lazarus helps us to make a good preparation for the approach of Easter. The liturgy of Ash Wednesday invites us to an experience quite similar to that of the rich man. When the priest imposes the ashes on our heads, he repeats the words: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”. As it turned out, the rich man and the poor man both died, and the greater part of the parable takes place in the afterlife. The two characters suddenly discover that “we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it” (1 Tim 6:7).

We too see what happens in the afterlife. There the rich man speaks at length with Abraham, whom he calls “father” (Lk 16:24.27), as a sign that he belongs to God’s people. This detail makes his life appear all the more contradictory, for until this moment there had been no mention of his relation to God. In fact, there was no place for God in his life. His only god was himself.

The rich man recognizes Lazarus only amid the torments of the afterlife. He wants the poor man to alleviate his suffering with a drop of water. What he asks of Lazarus is similar to what he could have done but never did. Abraham tells him: “During your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus had his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony” (v. 25). In the afterlife, a kind of fairness is restored and life’s evils are balanced by good.

The parable goes on to offer a message for all Christians. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, who are still alive. But Abraham answers: “They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them” (v. 29). Countering the rich man’s objections, he adds: “If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead” (v. 31).

The rich man’s real problem thus comes to the fore. At the root of all his ills was the failure to heed God’s word. As a result, he no longer loved God and grew to despise his neighbour. The word of God is alive and powerful, capable of converting hearts and leading them back to God. When we close our heart to the gift of God’s word, we end up closing our heart to the gift of our brothers and sisters.

Dear friends, Lent is the favourable season for renewing our encounter with Christ, living in his word, in the sacraments and in our neighbour. The Lord, who overcame the deceptions of the Tempter during the forty days in the desert, shows us the path we must take. May the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion, so that we can rediscover the gift of God’s word, be purified of the sin that blinds us, and serve Christ present in our brothers and sisters in need. I encourage all the faithful to express this spiritual renewal also by sharing in the Lenten Campaigns promoted by many Church organizations in different parts of the world, and thus to favour the culture of encounter in our one human family. Let us pray for one another so that, by sharing in the victory of Christ, we may open our doors to the weak and poor. Then we will be able to experience and share to the full the joy of Easter.



DIOCESAN LENTEN REGULATIONS

The following are to be made known in Lent to the faithful, including Religious Communities, in all Parishes and missions. What concerns certain feasts etc. should be repeated during the year at the appropriate time.

1. Days of Obligation

Regarding Sundays and feast days of obligation, Canon 1246 prescribes **ten days of obligation**. In India, Christmas and the feast of the Assumption of our Lady are days of obligation. Three feasts, the Epiphany of Our Lord, the Ascension of Christ and the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ have been transferred to Sundays.

The other five solemnities: Mary Mother of God; the Immaculate Conception; St. Joseph; the Apostles, Ss Peter and Paul; and All Saints are omitted as feast days of obligation in India.

The obligation of assisting at Mass is satisfied whenever Mass is celebrated in any Catholic Rite, either on a holy day itself or in the previous evening (after 4.00 P.M.) of the previous day and on the eve of Christmas and the Assumption.

2. **Easter Duties** may be fulfilled from Ash Wednesday to Trinity Sunday.

3. Penitential Law

Canon 1251 and the following regulations, prescribe days of penance for the universal Church. By virtue of the powers given by the Decree of February 27, 1996, the CBCI has mitigated the norms.

4. **Days of Penance:** All the Fridays of the year and the days of Lent.

Since on these days, one is no more bound to abstain from meat, some other penitential work must substitute it. Substitution may be done by one of the following devotional practices and good works, or similar ones:

- (i) Assisting at Mass
- (ii) Visit to the Church
- (iii) Reception of Holy Communion
- (iv) Stations of the Cross
- (v) Almsgiving
- (vi) Visiting the poor
- (vii) Visiting the sick either at home or in hospitals
- (viii) Reading the Bible or a Spiritual Book
- (ix) The family Rosary
- (x) Abstaining from going to the picnic/cinema or from smoking /alcoholic drinks
- (xi) Bearing sickness or suffering patiently.

The usual faculties for Parish Priests or Confessors are still in force for dispensing or substituting, even in the case of above. See *Vademecum*.

5. Fast and Abstinence.

Days of Fast and Abstinence: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Abstinence become mandatory from the age of 14; fast, from the age of 21 to 60 (Paenitemini IV)

We should teach all to go beyond the law as regards, specially, penance during Lent.

Though the obligation of specific acts of Lenten penance has been removed since some years, the need for Lenten penance remains. On all penitential days, e.g. Lent, Fridays on which fast or abstinence was prescribed in the past, the obligation **should be replaced** by other mortification, or works of charity or piety. Those who can keep fast are advised to do so. Those who cannot must substitute it by something else.

The law of penance is essential to Christian life. The changes are not a dispensation, but a 'permission to substitute something else, additional and voluntary, which one is not already obliged

to do by one's duty or state of life. Those availing themselves of this general dispensation, all including Priests and Religious, are exhorted to make up by voluntary practices, especially during Lent: assisting at Mass; some additional time of prayer, specially meditation; visiting the sick; some voluntary mortification in eating, drinking, smoking, amusements, putting aside for the poor the money thus saved; giving alms more generously to the poor, to charitable works, specially to the "Campaign against Hunger", accepting more patiently, in a spirit of penance, the trials, sickness, sufferings, contradictions of life.

We should make full pastoral use of Lent, through Sunday and other instructions, intensive preparation for Easter Communion of first communicants, of catechumens. Lenten season is eminently suited for adult catechesis. In many places, the Way of the Cross in the villages is very effective.

Let the **renewal of Baptismal vows on Holy Saturday** be a means of Christian renewal for us and for our people. It should be prepared with a catechesis.

6. The following **collections** must be made in all the Churches including the Mission Centres, Chapels and sent to the Bishop's House, Varanasi.

Name of Collection	Occasion	Purpose	Last Date to submit to the Procurator
Holy Childhood	2 nd Sunday February	Poor Children all over the world	28 th February
Maintenance of the Holy See	Easter	Structures of the Holy See	10 th May
Holy Land	Good Friday	For the upkeep of Holy Place in Holy Land	10 th May
Peter's Pence	Sunday after 29 th June (Peter & Paul)	Needs of Holy Father	10 th August
Mission Sunday	Last but one Sunday of October	Evangelization all over the world	10 th November
Pro Afris	Christmas	Missions in Africa	10 th January
St. Peter the Apostle	Sunday after the feast of St. Jean Marie Vianney	Seminarians & Novices in Mission Countries	10 th September
Lenten Campaign	Lenten Season	Hunger and needy of the world	10 th May
Seminarians of the Diocese	Pentecost Sunday	Needs of Seminarians in Diocese	10 th June

On other Sundays of the year and the Feast days of Obligation the collection should be taken for the upkeep of the respective Church. In order to fall in line with the Catholics of the whole world, Lent has been set aside by the CBCI for the Campaign against Hunger and Disease. All the contributions received from the Parishes and Institutions will be forwarded by the Diocese to Caritas India, New Delhi.

7. Distribution of the Eucharist: As per the rule of the Church the approved ordinary and extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist will distribute Communion with decorum. They **shall not pass the ciborium** to the devotees to pick the Sacred Host by themselves. They should wear their special dress.

8. For the celebration of the Eucharist in this Diocese, an alb or cassock, and stole are mandatory.

9. Dress for Priests of Agra region:

1. The cassock is the usual and **official dress** for Priests. It should be worn:
 - a. For Liturgical celebration, b. For official functions, c. When on duty in School etc.
2. **Civil Dress:** Civil dress may be worn when off duty.

The dress of the Priest manifests his Person and it should be sober and becoming.