



Bishop's Lenten Message 2017

Spiritual Warfare against Evil Intensified: Ba Minshioni Ba Lelo Nifwe

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. On 1st March we begin the Season of Lent - the intensive 40 days' spiritual journey towards that great summit of our Christian faith and worship: the annual celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus from the Dead, the ultimate victory of good over evil.

2. The Word of God that is proclaimed during the liturgical celebrations of the subsequent five Sundays (Year A) have a particularly rich pedagogical character that guides catechumens towards the waters of baptism and general Christian Initiation on the Easter Vigil. All the faithful must equally endeavour to draw maximum benefit from the wealth of these carefully selected passages, in view of their own solemn renewal of the baptism promises during the same Easter Vigil and in order to be spiritually recharged for the ongoing battle against temptations and sin.

The Sunday Gospel passages that will lead the way during this Lenten itinerary include: (1) The Temptations of Jesus - Matthew 4:1-11, (2) The Transfiguration of Jesus - Matthew 17:1-9, (3) Jesus' Encounter with the Samaritan Woman at the Well - John 4:5-42, (4) Jesus' Healing of the Man who was Born Blind - John 9:1-42 and (5) Jesus' Raising of Lazarus from Death - John 11:1-45.

As you may notice, the last three passages from the Gospel according to John are quite lengthy. However, with adequate preparation, these Readings may be proclaimed using the role-play format, as is done on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. The priest and selected faithful could take the respective roles of Jesus and other individuals in the passage. By so doing and, when done diligently, this manner of proclamation enables the congregation to follow with greater attention.

I invite all priests to carefully meditate upon these Readings during this whole period of grace so as to be able to deliver a fitting message to the faithful during the celebration of the Eucharist. Furthermore, in view of the so many Centres that still do not have priests on Sundays, I ask all parish priests to ensure that there is sufficient prior preparation of the prayer leaders and/or catechists who are selected to comment on the Word of God during the Sunday worship in their respective outstations.

In addition, I enclose, with this letter, the Lenten homily notes that the JCTR has graciously shared with us. Let them be further distributed to the Small Christian Communities (SCC), Lay Groups as well as individuals for further reflection and appropriate action that is inspired by the Word of God.

3. This year's Lent coincides with the Pastoral Theme in our Diocese according to which we celebrate the ministry of the pioneer missionaries and declare that "We are the Missionaries of Today" (Ba Minshioni ba Lelo, Nifwe). Let us recall the sacrifice, availability and pastoral zeal of our gallant pioneer missionaries and in turn make a commitment to the effect that their works will live on through each one of us. Indeed, the Church, in Mansa Diocese, shall continue to announce the Good News to all creation, in obedience to the great commission of our Lord Jesus (Mark 16: 15).

4. To rekindle this missionary zeal, the Lenten Season offers us the instruments of Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving according to the guidance of Jesus, as proclaimed in the Gospel passage of Ash Wednesday (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18). These three pillars of Lent, when taken seriously, have the capacity to bring about lasting positive change in our lives, especially in overcoming the sinful habits that we repeatedly struggle with. I invite each one of you to pray, fast and give alms with the intention of being liberated from any such demeaning slavery.

Furthermore, in order to intensify our spiritual warfare against evil through combined effort and, in response to the appeals made during the Pastoral Council Meeting last October, I again invite the faithful in all our parishes to observe the "24 hours for the Lord" on the Friday to Saturday of the 3rd Week of Lent (24 - 25 March). Let this day be flooded with prayers, songs, Eucharistic adoration, catechesis and actual celebration of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. It would be fitting that this special day concludes with the joyful Eucharistic celebration of the solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord on Saturday, 25th March.

I implore you, my dear brothers and sisters in the Diocese, to take the invitation seriously and spare this '24 hours' exclusively for the Lord. Bring to this special period of intense prayer the needs of our society and individual members for healing from anger, guilt, unforgiving heart, drunkenness, sexual immoralities, pride, selfishness, etc. Through this prayer, let us also invoke Divine intervention to end the ongoing violence against the sanctity of human life, the values of marriage and family as well as the integrity of God's creation.

5. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you. I wish you a fruitful and grace-filled Lenten Season 2017.



+Patrick Chisanga, OFM Conv

Given on this First Day of March in the Year of the Lord 2017, the Ash Wednesday