



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE  
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Lent 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In our Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent, Saint Matthew tells us that before Jesus began His public ministry, He was “led by the Spirit into the desert” (*Mt. 4:1*), where He prayed, fasted, and gave Himself over to a life of Gospel poverty. Lent is the sacred time in which, following the example of Jesus, we are led by the same Holy Spirit into the solitude of the desert to deepen our relationship with the Father and purify our hearts to become like the Son. The Spirit that draws each of us into this period of preparation does so through the practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These three pillars of Lenten observance call us away from the selfishness of sin and lead us to a deeply personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

Recognizing that many have never experienced this personal relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit has led our local Church to embark on a period of Eucharistic Revival—a movement aimed at leading many to encounter Jesus by restoring understanding and devotion to the great mystery of the Eucharist. Following the Spirit’s desire to rekindle Eucharistic amazement in our hearts, let us reflect on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving as practices deeply rooted in devotion to the Body and Blood of Jesus.

The Mass is the greatest prayer of the Church, the “source and summit of the Christian life” (*CCC 1324*). Lenten prayer focused on the Eucharist calls us to rediscover the Catholic practice of praying the Mass by offering our intentions, work, hardships, and family life as “spiritual sacrifices” united to the priest’s offering of the Lord’s Body (*Lumen Gentium, 34*). In this way the great prayer of the Church becomes the great prayer of our lives: the summit to which all our daily sacrifices are directed and the source from which graces flow into everyday life.

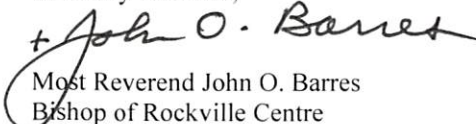
Prayerfully receiving the Eucharist not only requires bodily fasting from food but also spiritual fasting from worldly attachments that keep us from communion with God. At prayer in the desert, Christ rejects the temptations of Satan by reciting a scripture verse from Deuteronomy 8:3, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” The Lord recognizes that bodily fasting becomes a prayer only when it moves us to cling to God’s Word. This Lent may we take time to prepare for the Sunday Eucharist not only by fasting, but also by meditating on the weekly scriptures.

In the second century, Saint Justin Martyr wrote one of the earliest accounts of the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. He recounts that after the breaking of the bread, the early Christians would be moved to give alms and “take care of all who are in need” (*First Apology, 67*). The Church has always recognized an inseparable bond between the sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrifice of almsgiving. Saint John Chrysostom even understood almsgiving as a Eucharistic action. He described the poor person as an “altar” where one could encounter the Body of Christ and offer everywhere a daily sacrifice (*Homily 20 on Second Corinthians*). As we remember the sacrifice of Christ at each Sunday Eucharist, may we always remember the poor.

Christ entered the desert for 40 days to prepare for the mission ahead of Him. Following the Lord’s example, we enter the Lenten desert of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving with the goal of becoming Eucharistic missionaries. The Holy Spirit is leading each of us to a personal encounter with the Lord and calling us to pray and fast for the conversion of many hearts during this grace-filled moment of Eucharistic Revival.

Let us follow the Spirit’s guidance with open hearts ready to receive the Lord; and may the heart of Jesus, in the Most Blessed Sacrament, be praised, adored, and loved with grateful affection, at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time.

Sincerely in Christ,

  
+ John O. Barres  
Most Reverend John O. Barres  
Bishop of Rockville Centre