



Diocese of Fall River
Office of the Bishop
Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.

Bishop da Cunha's 2018 Lenten Message

**Why should we do Penance and make sacrifice?
Is the acceptance of the inevitable suffering something we can learn to deal with?**

Dear Friends,

Many of us remember - maybe even with some nostalgia - when Lent was a time of real Penance and sacrifice. The Church still teaches us that Lent is a special time of conversion; that Penance and sacrifice are essential practices to help us in the process of change, which leads to sanctification. Obviously, Penance and sacrifice are not limited to the practice of Fasting and Abstinence - although these are good and practical ways to incorporate sacrifices into our daily lives. This is not meant to indicate that our spirit is good or our body is bad. However, bodily discipline and some sacrifices are good for spirit and body. When we fail to recognize our need for sacrifice, we fail to acknowledge our need for conversion. Sacrifices are not meant to be an end in themselves; they are always meant as a means to conversion and sanctification.

Lent is a time to remember all that Jesus did for us and to acknowledge all He was willing to suffer for us. By accepting and embracing our own sufferings, we share in the sufferings of Christ, so that we can also share in His Resurrection. But who wants to suffer? No one likes to face suffering. We do all we can to avoid suffering. We try to eat well, exercise, visit the doctor, have our annual check-up; all this to avoid sickness and suffering. However, we also know that we cannot fully avoid suffering. No one is immune to the evils that surround us and no one is exempt from the suffering that befalls us. One of the greatest problems of humanity is to learn how to suffer. Do we realize that suffering can also be a path to happiness, fulfillment, transformation and Salvation?

No one is ready to accept suffering until they know the good it does. Since suffering is unavoidable, we might as well learn to accept it and discover its value. "The one who faces suffering for itself is a masochist, the one who suffers for a superior ideal is a wise person" (Huberto Rohden). That is what Jesus did and taught us to do. Don't suffer aimlessly. Jesus knew that His sufferings were not useless; He knew that He was saving the world through His suffering. That is why He was able to accept it lovingly and peacefully. "Son though He was, He learned obedience from what He suffered; and when He was made perfect, He became the source of eternal Salvation for all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:8). The one who rebels against suffering faces two evils instead of one.

When, like Jesus, we learn how to make our sufferings meaningful and redemptive; when we learn how to offer our sufferings to God as an oblation, as a sacrifice, as a prayer for us and for others, our sufferings will be easier to bear. As St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, "we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

Let us keep the Spirit of Lent alive in our families, our homes, our parishes, our schools and in our own lives. Let us keep the Spirit of Sacrifice, and let us teach our children the value of making Penance and sacrifice during Lent. Let us all take time during Lent to pray together as a family so that the future generations will not forget that Jesus suffered and died to save us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V.
Bishop of Fall River