

## St. Edward, St. George, St. Paul, St. Peter Parishes

February 9, 2018

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This Wednesday – February 14<sup>th</sup>- is **Ash Wednesday** and marks the beginning of the holy season of Lent. On this day, we have Masses in the morning and evening where ashes are imposed on our foreheads to remind us that “we are dust and unto dust we shall return”.

I wish to quote extensively Pope Francis’ Lenten message to help us during this season of Lent. Lent is a time of grace, which summons us, and enables us to come back to the Lord wholeheartedly and in every aspect of our life. Pope Francis reflected on Jesus’ words : *“Because of the increase of iniquity, the love of many will grow cold.”*(Mt.24:12). These words of Jesus appear in His preaching about the end of time. Jesus foretells a great tribulation and amid great trials, false prophets would lead people astray and the love that is the core of the Gospel would grow cold in the hearts of many.

“Let us listen to the Gospel passage and try to understand the guise such false prophets can assume. They can appear as “snake charmers”, who manipulate human emotions in order to enslave others and lead them where they would have them go. How many of God’s children are mesmerized by momentary pleasures, mistaking them for true happiness! How many men and women live entranced by the dream of wealth, which only makes them slaves to profit and petty interests! How many go through life believing that they are sufficient unto themselves, and end up entrapped by loneliness! False prophets can also be “charlatans”, who offer easy and immediate solutions to suffering that soon prove utterly useless. How many young people are taken in by the panacea of drugs, of disposable relationships, of easy but dishonest gains! How many more are ensnared in a thoroughly “virtual” existence, in which relationships appear quick and straightforward, only to prove meaningless! These swindlers, in peddling things that have no real value, rob people of all that is most precious: dignity, freedom and the ability to love. They appeal to our vanity, our trust in appearances, but in the end they only make fools of us. Nor should we be surprised. In order to confound the human heart, the devil, who is “a liar and the father of lies”(Jn.8:44), has always presented evil as good, falsehood as truth. That is why each of us is called to peer into our heart to see if we are falling prey to the lies of these false prophets. We must learn to look closely, beneath the surface, and to recognize what leaves a good and lasting mark on our hearts, because it comes from God and is truly for our benefit.”

“What are the signs that indicate that our love is beginning to cool? More than anything else, what destroys charity is greed for money, “the root of all evil” (1Tim.6:10). The rejection of God and His peace soon follows; we prefer our own desolation rather than the comfort found in His Word and the Sacraments. All this leads to violence against anyone we think is a threat to our “certainties”: the unborn child, the elderly and infirm, the migrant, the alien among us, or our neighbor who does not live up to our expectations.

Creation itself becomes a silent witness to this cooling of charity....Love can also grow cold in our own communities.”

“So what are we to do? The Church, our Mother and Teacher, along with the often bitter medicine of the truth, offers us in the Lenten season the soothing remedy of **prayer**, **almsgiving** and **fasting**. By devoting more time to **prayer**, we enable our hearts to root out our secret lies and forms of self-deception, and then to find the consolation God offers. **Almsgiving** sets us free from greed and helps us to regard our neighbor as a brother or sister. What I possess is never mine alone. How I would like almsgiving to become a genuine style of life for each of us! **Fasting** weakens our tendency to violence; it disarms us and becomes an important opportunity for growth. On the one hand, it allows us to experience what the destitute and the starving have to endure. On the other hand, it expresses our own spiritual hunger and thirst for life in God.”

Aside from observing the three disciplines of Lent, we should come up with a personal program for spiritual growth. I wish to recommend to you, my sisters and brothers, that you come up with something negative and something positive.

By something negative, I mean that each person should commit himself or herself to giving up something or a number of things. This sacrifice should be serious and demanding. The self-control that we exercise in giving up a legitimate pleasure strengthens our will and curbs the inclinations of our passions.

By something positive, I mean that each one should also do some kind of act that we would not normally do on a regular basis. Attending daily Mass, Way of the Cross during Fridays, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, visiting the sick, praying the Rosary with the entire family are positive acts of virtue that have helped many people progress in their relationship with God. Bring home the Parish Bulletin that has the Lenten schedule.

A serious observance of Lent will be like a spring-cleaning, which will purify the clutter that has accumulated in our lives. A serious commitment to penance will also help us to conquer addictions, obsessions and compulsive behavior. A serious Lent will purify our soul and allow us to experience a deeper interior freedom.

For this Lent, we should carefully examine our lives. Most of all, receiving the Sacrament of Confession will surely help us prepare for the joy of Easter.

May this holy season of Lent be fruitful and full of blessings for us all!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fr. Felino S. Paulino'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Fr. Felino S. Paulino

