

## *Bishop's Lenten Message*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“These forty days of Lent, O Lord, with you we fast and pray.”

This line from a popular hymn we sing in our parishes during the season of Lent contains a very important truth. During the days and weeks of penance that lie ahead – from **Ash Wednesday, February 14th** until **Holy Thursday, March 29th** – it is with YOU, Lord, with YOU we fast and pray. The model Jesus gave us for “these forty days” was his own experience of the desert and the temptations that followed him there where he encountered Satan face to face. And yet, Jesus, there in the desert – alone, fasting and in intense prayer – beat back the devil and triumphed over temptation, as strong and as unrelenting as it was throughout those forty days.



We enter the desert of Lent like Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, to face our devils, our temptations head on. But we are not alone. “With YOU we fast and pray” is our song. The Lord Jesus Christ is with us. And so, too, is the Church, the entire community of faith observing Lent. “With YOU, too, we fast and pray.” Here is what the Catholic Church in the United States asks of us as baptized Catholics:

- The **days of fast** (only one full meal) **and abstinence** (no meat) are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
- All other Fridays of Lent are **days of abstinence** (no meat).
- Those between the ages of 18 and 59 are obliged to fast (only one full meal) as above. From the age of 14, people are also obliged to abstain (no meat: this obligation prohibits the eating of meat, but not eggs, milk products or condiments of any kind, even though made from animal fat).

The obligation to observe the laws of fast and abstinence is a serious one for Catholics. Failure to observe one penitential day in itself is not considered a serious sin. It is the failure to observe any penitential days at all, or a substantial number of days, which must be considered serious.

The obligation, the privilege really, of receiving the Eucharist at least once a year – often called “Easter duty” – for those in the state of grace should still be fulfilled during the period from the **First Sunday of Lent, February 18th** to **Trinity Sunday, May 27th**. However, the Church’s law does permit this precept to be fulfilled at another time during the year when there is a just cause.

I want to encourage Catholics to get to confession and to make use of the sacrifices and traditions that have always been part of our Lenten practices in the Church.

We do, indeed, fast and pray with the Lord Jesus and with our fellow Catholics. May this Lent be a time of penance, grace and joy for us all.

Sincerely yours in Christ,  
Most Reverend David M. O’Connell, C.M.  
Bishop of Trenton

## PRO-LIFE CORNER

### Love and Protection of the Unborn

The whole mission of the Catholic Church in the world—the theme and purpose and vocation of every institution and every Catholic individual—is love.

Why does the Church set up hospitals and adoption agencies and soup kitchens? Why have whole orders of nuns been founded to care for the elderly or the sick? Why did St. Damien offer to go to spend his last years serving in a leper colony in Hawaii? Why did Mother Teresa establish homes for men dying of AIDs?

It's not for money. It's not for recognition. It's not a plan to increase our numbers and our social influence. It's not even because the Church is committed to taking care of her own. It matters not at all to any of these institutions or individuals whether the people they're serving are Catholic. They don't have to be Catholic. They can even be anti-Catholic. We don't do it for ourselves; we do it for love.

We do it because we understand that each and every person is made in the image and likeness of God. Each, no matter how small or weak or wounded or messed up, is completely unique and infinitely precious.

We understand that all human life—including every child in the womb—is a gift to be received, cherished, and served, not abused, not manipulated, not degraded, not destroyed.

***"I am opposed to abortion, but I don't believe I have the right to impose my personal beliefs on others".***

You will sometimes hear this stated by members of the general public, but it is more commonly said by politicians who are trying to "finesse" the abortion issue. The trick is to appear philosophically pro-life so they do not have to defend the reality of abortion, and functionally, pro-abortion so they do not upset the abortion lobby. They think that this is a shrewd view, when in fact it is just a cowardly one. Unfortunately, for political expediency, many of our "Catholic" politicians take this hypocritical and shameful position!

Understand that the only logical basis for someone to be "personally opposed to abortion" is because they realize that abortion terminates the life of an innocent human being. While claiming to believe that however, they say it should be legal. So what they are really saying is, *"Abortion is the intentional killing of a helpless child, but I wouldn't do anything to stop it. I am willing to look the other way while someone else takes the life of a child"*.

That is a smoke screen. Only a coward and/or a hypocrite would concede that unborn children are living human beings but that it is none of his (or her) business if someone wants to abort them. It is no different than saying that they are opposed to rape but it is none of their business if men want to rape women, or that rape is not an area in which the government should be involved.

We live in a nation where over 3,000 innocent children lose their lives each and every day to the intentional act of abortion. If this is not an area of legitimate governmental interest, then the government has no legitimate interest at all!

***"Abortion is only used in certain unavoidable circumstances. Abortion is not used as birth control."***

When the abortion lobby was originally selling the idea of making abortion legal, they ridiculed those who said it would one day be used as birth control. They said abortion would only be used in extreme and rare cases.

Today, even statistics submitted by pro-choice organizations prove this to be a lie. The data shows, (a) only a tiny percentage of abortions are done for the so-called "hard cases" such as rape; (b) approximately half of all abortions are repeat abortions; and (c) over 35% of all U.S. women will have at least one abortion by age 45.

When over 3,000 babies lose their life to abortion each and every day that can hardly be described as a "rare" occurrence! Given this fact, abortion apologists have switched gears and are now selling the idea that even if abortion is used as birth control, it's a private matter and no one else's business.

Of course, it most definitely is our business, because legalized abortion has proven to be not only morally indefensible, but also a financial disaster. Our tax dollars pay for abortions and since abortion has been legal, we have been forced to bear the financial burden of skyrocketing pregnancy rates of unmarried mothers.

Most importantly, before anyone can participate in any activity derived from his or her right to privacy, we must first ask, "The privacy to do what?" In the case of abortion, we are talking about the privacy to take the life of an innocent child. Thus, the only decent view is that when one individual's "choice" or "right to privacy" will cost another human being his or her life, that choice cannot be considered a matter of privacy.

### A woman's right to "choose"?

The word "choice" (as used on the subject of abortion) is probably the most misleading and deceptive term in the English language.

While it might sound good to say that government should allow people to make all their own choices, that is neither practical nor desirable. Some choices are crimes. All crimes are choices.

Once a woman is pregnant, barring a miscarriage or an induced abortion, she will have a baby. Therefore, her only "choice" is, "How is the baby going to come out?" Will he or she come out alive and crying, or dead and in pieces? Truly, her choice is between life and death—a live baby, or a dead one.

### In 1994, Saint Teresa of Kolkata during the National Prayer Breakfast said:

"Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion.... I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child, murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another?"