



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

LENT 2018

Dear Friends:

As we look to the future we are aware that we continue to face difficulties both here on Long Island and in our country at large. Whether they involve the opioid epidemic, gang violence, racism, or any other threat, a deep trust and reliance on the Risen Christ is necessary for us to advance and make progress in dealing with these problems.

In order to better welcome the Resurrected Jesus into our hearts, a solid Lenten spirituality grounded in prayer, fasting and almsgiving for the needs of the Church and the World is essential.

On Wednesday, April 4, 2018 we will commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the tragic death of Dr. Martin Luther King. Our commemoration of this anniversary falls appropriately between Easter Sunday (April 1) and Divine Mercy Sunday (April 8).

I would ask that during the Lenten season we all prepare for this historic anniversary by dedicating dimensions of our Lenten prayer, fasting and almsgiving to the pursuit of racial harmony and comprehensive immigration reform grounded in the principles of the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the human person.

By aligning our Lent in solidarity with our African American and Hispanic brothers and sisters and the injustices they have suffered and are suffering, we dream and act with Dr. King and his clarion call for justice in our land.

We dream and act in a way that treasures the African American legacy of contribution in this country. We dream and act in a way that not only welcomes our Hispanic brothers and sisters but expresses our deep appreciation for their gifts and leadership in the Church and in American society, and we advocate together for comprehensive immigration reform.¹

We also think and pray globally this Lent as we remember the people in North Korea, Jerusalem and every country in the Middle East, Bangladesh, Haiti, Venezuela, South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, The Central African Republic, Nigeria and every war-torn and poverty-stricken area of the World.

We remember the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, those who suffer with mental illness, chronic physical illness and pain. We remember the hundreds of thousands of unborn children whose innocent lives are taken every year through abortion and the terrible toll this takes on individuals, families and our entire society.

¹ See Bishop Barres' September 21, 2017 Founder's Week Keynote Address at St. John's University entitled *The Relationship between Catholic Sacramental Theology and Catholic Social Justice Teaching: The Sacrament of Penance in Service of 'Welcoming the Stranger'* in the January 2018 edition of *The Long Island Catholic*.

We remember the addicted and particularly those who suffer opioid addiction, those ensnared in the culture of death of gangs, drug trade, human trafficking, and their victims -- who are often children -- at the borders, those who suffer violations of religious liberty and the sanctity of human life, those who suffer from the trauma of sexual abuse and all forms of abuse, harassment or cyberbullying, those in the midst of a family or marital crisis, those who grieve the loss of a child, a spouse, a friend, a loved one. We remember the painful crosses that our elderly carry and we give thanks for the wisdom and prayer that they model for us.

And, of course, we remember our servicemen and women overseas and their families back home, and our first responders here. We remember our Veterans and their sacrifices.²

As we prepare for the Easter Vigil Fire and for Easter Sunday, we ask the Holy Spirit to guide and refresh us during this Season of Lent. So often the cycles and seasons of life can become routine and stale. When applied specifically to Lent, we may find ourselves doing the same things each year, which results in them becoming commonplace and no longer a challenge.

A frequent theme for Lent is “giving something up”. Many times this takes the form of refraining from junk food or sweets. This is a good challenge, but it is important to remember that Lent should not be just a time for losing weight; fasting without prayer is just dieting. Additionally, food is not all that we “consume”.

All the things we allow into our senses are important to examine. What we watch, what we listen to are just as important as what we eat. One thing we consume in great quantities is social media.

Like all technology, do we use our social media for good or do we become consumed by it? Social media can help us connect with people and provide us important and relevant information but it can also be used to waste valuable time or to engage in angry, critical arguments.

During Lent may I suggest that we do an examination of conscience in regard to our use of social media? Can we intentionally leverage every dimension of our presence on a range of social media platforms to pursue *dramatic missionary growth* on Long Island?

We may do that by giving testimony on Facebook to a positive experience of a Catholic parish, a Catholic Bible Study or a Catholic school. We may post an image on Pinterest or Periscope of a parish activity or Holy Hour experience that was particularly meaningful. We might establish a link on our platform to the *Long Island Catholic*.

We might witness on a social media platform as a married couple or family about the value of the Sacrament of Penance to family forgiveness and unity as we encourage other families we know to participate in *Reconciliation Monday* on Monday, March 26, 2018.

² These intentions reflect some of the intentions Bishop Barres mentioned in his Christmas Midnight Mass and Christmas Morning homily thus giving some continuity to our prayers and sacrifices across liturgical seasons.

Our dedicated priests, who are both humble penitents and compassionate confessors, will be available in the confessionals of all our parishes in the Diocese of Rockville Centre on March 26th from 3:00PM – 9:00PM. Please note that the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn join us in this effort so if you are working in Manhattan or Brooklyn that day you could easily go to confession at a nearby parish.

We can also use our social media platforms to follow Catholics who put forth holy and wholesome content that can enrich us spiritually and intellectually. We can follow the Diocese of Rockville Centre, the Office of Vocations, Catholic Charities, and so many more. Additionally we can follow Pope Francis and the Vatican, Bishop Robert Barron's *Word on Fire* and other social media with inspiring and motivating Catholic content.

Related to social media, we may tend to “binge watch” videos whether through YouTube or streaming services. This content in and of itself might not be bad, but does it always lift us spiritually? Telecare can aid us in prayers like the Rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet as well as its inspiring programming.

Additionally, the Augustine Institute has started a new initiative called FORMED. This is an app that has many eBooks we can put on our Kindles and iPads, lectures and talks we can listen to on our phones during our commutes to work and school, and Catholic movies and presentations that we can stream online, almost like a Catholic Netflix.

Many of our parishes on Long Island have already invested in FORMED and are strategizing about how best to have a higher percentage of parishioners to be actively “formed” by the excellent content.

Finally, outside of the realm of media, something that always nourishes and enriches us is the Sacraments. Frequent reception of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation help re-center and reorder us. May this Lent be a source of *dramatic missionary growth* both in our lives and for our great Diocese and beyond.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ John O. Barres". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre