



Archdiocese of Philadelphia  
Office of the Cardinal  
222 North 17<sup>th</sup> Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299

February 28, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

In the life of the Church, Lent is all about facing the reality of sin in the light of the victory of Christ's Death and Resurrection.

Each one of us knows that we are called to acknowledge sin in our lives. At every Mass we admit this reality. In the *confiteor*, for example, we say clearly: "I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do...."

In his first Letter, Saint John says to us: "If we say, 'We are without sin,' we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. If we say, 'We have not sinned,' we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10).

Throughout the centuries of Christianity, Lent has always been a special time to acknowledge our sins, to ask God's pardon, and to resolve—with His help—not to sin again. In Lent we express deep sorrow for having offended God and our neighbor.

On Ash Wednesday we hear those powerful words: "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel." This is a call to repentance and to fidelity for us as individuals and for the entire community of the Church. We are invited to express this repentance and fidelity through practices that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us in the Gospels: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

With repentance for our sins we humbly ask the forgiveness of God, which comes to us through Christ. We also humbly ask the forgiveness of all those whom we have offended in any way. We likewise beg God to bring about reconciliation and healing in our community.

During this Lent we are especially conscious of the grave sins of sexual abuse committed against minors, in particular by members of the clergy. We experience the need to ask God's forgiveness repeatedly in our liturgy and to offer prayers of reparation for these sins and for all the sins of the world.

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As we begin Lent, I invite the faithful of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to join me for a penitential service, including the Stations of the Cross, in the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul on the first Friday of Lent, March 11, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. We will pray for the forgiveness of all sins and for reconciliation with God and in the community. In our petitions we will ask for the healing of all victims, that through the power of God's grace sexual abuse will be effectively prevented, and that young people will always be respected and protected and be able to live the full measure of their human dignity as children of God without being abused by anyone.

In addition to this penitential service, I intend to meet next week on several occasions with our priests, who serve so faithfully, in order to pray with them and to assure them of my encouragement, my deep trust and my gratitude for their generous ministry to our people.

As we acknowledge the reality of sin in our own lives and in the community of the Church, we also proclaim the power of the Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ to overcome sin, to convert our hearts and the hearts of all sinners, and to help us walk in newness of life. In the words of Saint John: "If we acknowledge our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing."

Sincerely in Christ,

*+ Justin Card. Rigali*

Cardinal Justin Rigali  
Archbishop of Philadelphia