



SUNDAY REFLECTION

Today I forgive those who have hurt me:
those who have criticized me,
those who have excluded me,
those who have isolated me,
those who have taken advantage of my goodness,
those who have laughed at me,
those who have rejoiced at my misfortunes.
May I be able to forgive as Jesus forgives me.
May I be able to ask for forgiveness from those I have deeply wounded
I pray that they will be able to forgive me my faults as well.

STEWARDSHIP: In today's first reading, the Israelites are urged to love their neighbors as themselves. In the Gospel, Jesus spells out how we are to do that – to give generously to those who ask of us and not to turn our backs on those who seek to borrow.

READING FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

26 FEB '20

Jl. 2:12-18: Joel's appeal to the people to implore the mercy and blessing of God in a time of great crisis is a fitting opening to our 'campaign of Christian service'. We embark on the disciplines of the Lenten season with confidence that we are returning to a God who is slow to anger, abounding in love.

2 Cor. 5:20-6:2: Paul's assertion that now is the favorable time, that this is the day of salvation, encourages us to seek reconciliation with God, so that we may be in turn effective instruments of reconciliation. Our Lenten observance is not only for our own spiritual renewal, but so we may respond more fruitfully to the grace we have received.

Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18: The encouragement by Jesus to consider the traditional practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving emphasizes that they are for our internal conversion, not external show. We embark on a Lenten program so as to be more attentive to the Spirit as we journey towards Easter. The joy of the resurrection that we anticipate makes this a serious, rather than a sad season. Like all journeys, the road is easier when we travel with companions, marked today with the powerful symbol of ashes.

STEWARDSHIP: In today's Gospel Jesus warns that our giving must be done quietly, without hoping for recognition or applause. But He also promises that God, who sees even our most secret deeds, will reward those who fast, pray, and give alms.

READINGS FOR FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

1 MAR '20

Gn. 2:7-9; 3:1-7: A way to lie is to tell people what they want to hear, for pride makes us gullible. Adam and Eve allow their own desires to take precedence over God's command and so introduce sin into their lives.

Rom. 5:12-19: Paul explains how sin has become endemic in the human race, and how Jesus came to reverse its effects.

Mt. 4:1-11: Friends do not use each other, but if he cannot make us deny God, Satan wishes us to use God, so we will not be friends with God.

LITURGICAL SEASONS LENT

Lent is the second penitential season after Advent on the Church's liturgical calendar. This is a special time of prayer, penance, sacrifice and good works meant to prepare us for the celebration of Easter. In the reform of the liturgy following the Second Vatican Council the Church Fathers in the document, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* stated, "The two elements which are especially characteristic of Lent – the recalling of baptism or the preparation for it, and penance – should be given greater emphasis in the liturgy and in liturgical catechesis. It is by means of them that the Church prepares the faithful for the celebration of Easter, while they hear God's word more frequently and devote more time to prayer" (no. 109). The word *Lent* itself is derived from the Anglo-Saxon words *lencten* meaning "Spring and *lenctentid* which literally means not only "Springtide" but also was the word for "March," the month in which the majority of Lent falls.

There is evidence from the earliest history of the Church of some kind of Lenten preparation for Easter. For instance, St. Irenaeus (d. 203) wrote to Pope St. Victor I, commenting on the

celebration of Easter and the differences between practices in the East and the West. “The dispute is not only about the day, but also about the actual character of the fast. Some think that they ought to fast for one day, some for two, others for still more; some make their ‘day’ last 40 hours on end. Such variation in the observance did not originate in our own day, but very much earlier, in the time of our forefathers” (Eusebius, *History of the Church*, V, 24). When Rufinus translated this passage from Greek into Latin, the punctuation made between “40” and “hours” made the meaning to appear to be “40 days, twenty-four hours a day.” The importance of the passage, nevertheless, remains that since the time of “our forefathers” – always an expression for the apostles – a 40 day period of Lenten preparation existed. However, the actual practices and duration of Lent were still not homogenous throughout the Church.

Lent becomes more regularized after the legalization of Christianity in A.D. 313. The Council of Nicea (325), in its disciplinary canons, noted that two provincial synods should be held each year, “one before the 40 days of Lent.” St. Athanasius (d. 373) in his “Festal Letters” implored his congregation to make a 40 day fast prior to the more intense fasting of Holy Week. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) in his *Catechetical Lectures*, which are the paradigm for our current RCIA programs, had 18 pre-baptismal instructions given to the catechumens during Lent. St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) in his series of “Festal Letters” also noted the practices and duration of Lent, emphasizing the 40 day period of fasting. Finally, Pope St. Leo (d. 461) preached that the faithful must “fulfill with their fasts the Apostolic institution of the 40 days,” again noting the apostolic origins of Lent. One can safely conclude that by the end of the fourth century, the 40 day period of Easter preparation known as Lent existed, and that prayer and fasting constituted its primary spiritual exercises.

Of course, the number “40” has always had special spiritual significance regarding preparation. On Mount Sinai, preparing to receive the Ten Commandments, “Moses stayed there with the Lord for 40 days and 40 nights, without eating any food or drinking any water” (Ex. 34:38). Elijah walked “40 days and 40 nights” to the mountain of the Lord, Mount Horeb (another name for Sinai) (1Kg.19:8). Most importantly, Jesus fasted and prayed for “40 days and 40 nights” in the desert before He began His public ministry (Mt. 4:2).

Once the 40 days of Lent were established, the next development concerned how much fasting was to be done. In Jerusalem, for instance, people fasted for 40 days, Monday through Friday, but not on Saturday or Sunday, thereby making Lent last for eight weeks. In Rome and in the West, people fasted for six weeks, Monday through Saturday, thereby making Lent last for six weeks. Eventually the practice prevailed of fasting for six days a week over the course of six weeks and Ash Wednesday was instituted to bring the number of fast days before Easter to 40. The rules of fasting varied. First, some area of the Church abstained from all forms of meat and animal products, while others made exceptions for food like fish. For example, Pope St. Gregory (d. 604), writing to St. Augustine of Canterbury, issued the following rule. “We abstain from fresh, meat, and from all things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese and eggs.” Second, the general rule was for a person to have one meal a day, in the evening or at 3 p.m. These Lenten fasting rules also evolved. Eventually, a smaller repast was allowed during the day to keep up one’s strength from manual labor. Eating fish was allowed, and later eating

meat was also allowed through the week except on Ash Wednesday and Friday. Dispensations were given for eating dairy products if a pious work was performed, and eventually this rule was relaxed totally. (However, the abstinence from even dairy products led to the practice of blessing Easter eggs and eating pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday.) Over the years, modifications have been made to the Lenten observances, making our practices not only simple but also easy. Ash Wednesday still marks the beginning of Lent, which lasts for 40 days, not including Sundays. The present fasting and abstinence laws are very simple. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, the faithful fast (having only one full meal a day and smaller snacks to keep up one's strength) and abstain from meat, on the other Fridays of Lent, the faithful abstain from meat. People are still encouraged "to give up something" for Lent as a sacrifice. (An interesting note is that technically on Sundays and solemnities like St. Joseph's Day (March 19) and the Annunciation (March 25), one is exempt and can partake of whatever has been offered up for Lent.

Nevertheless, I was always taught, "If you gave something up for the Lord, tough it out. Don't act like a Pharisee looking for a loophole." Moreover, an emphasis must be placed on performing spiritual works, like attending the Stations of the Cross, attending Mass, making a weekly holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament, taking time for personal prayer and spiritual reading and most especially making a good confession and receiving sacramental absolution. Although the practices may have evolved over the centuries, the focus remains the same: to repent of sin, to renew our faith and to prepare to celebrate joyfully the mysteries of our salvation.

LENTEN REGULATIONS FOR FASTING AND ABSTINENCE

Fasting is to be observed by all 18 years of age and older, who have not yet celebrated their 59th birthday. On a fast day one full meal is allowed. Two other meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one's needs, but together they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted, but liquids, including milk and juices, are allowed.

Why: "Denying material food, which nourishes our body, nurtures an interior disposition to listen to Christ and be fed by His saving word. Through fasting and praying, we allow Him to come and satisfy the deepest hunger that we experience in the depths of our being: the hunger and thirst for God." —Pope Benedict XVI

Abstinence is observed by all 14 years of age and older. On days of abstinence no meat is allowed. Note that when health or ability to work would be seriously affected, the law does not oblige. When in doubt concerning fast and abstinence, the parish priest should be consulted. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. All the Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence.

Why: "Catholic peoples from time immemorial have set apart Friday for special penitential observance by which they gladly suffer with Christ that they may one day be glorified with Him. This is the heart of the tradition of abstinence from meat on Friday where that tradition has been observed in the holy Catholic Church." —USCCB

ALMSGIVING: Material generosity to the less fortunate.

Why: Almsgiving "represents a specific way to assist those in need and, at the same time, an exercise in self-denial to free us from attachment to worldly goods . . . Almsgiving helps us to overcome this constant temptation, teaching us to respond to our neighbor's needs and to share with others whatever we possess through divine goodness." —Pope Benedict XVI
Fasting, almsgiving, and prayer are the three traditional disciplines of Lent. The faithful and catechumens should undertake these practices seriously in a spirit of penance and of preparation for baptism or of renewal of baptism at Easter

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ASH WEDNESDAY

Among the beautiful, meaningful and solemn ceremonies of the Catholic Church is the gathering of the faithful on Ash Wednesday.

This special day begins our Lenten journey. It is the start of 40 days of prayer, penance and almsgiving as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. But why does Lent begin on a Wednesday, and what is the significance of ashes? Ash Wednesday was added to the liturgical calendar well after the 40-day penitential season of Lent became the norm throughout the Latin Church. Lent, in turn, was universally established only after the early Church sorted out the date of Easter. The issue was clarified at the famous Council of Nicaea in 325 where "all the Churches agreed that Easter, the Christian Passover, should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon (14 Nisan) after the vernal equinox" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1170). The vernal (spring) equinox generally falls on March 21, thus the date of Easter in the Western Church can occur anytime between March 22 and April 25.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE ASHES

The Church has long used ashes as an outward sign of grief, a mark of humility, mourning, penance and morality. The Old Testament is filled with stories describing the use of ashes in such a manner. In the Book of Job, Job repented before God: "Therefore, I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6). Daniel "turned to the Lord God, to seek help, in prayer and petition, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes" (Dn 9:3). Jonah preached conversion and repentance to the people of Nineveh: "When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in the ashes" (Jon 3:6). And the Maccabees army prepared for battle: "That day they fasted and wore sackcloth; they sprinkled ashes on their heads and tore their garments" (1 Mc 3:47). Ashes were imposed on the early catechumens when they began their preparation time for baptism. Confessed sinners of that era were also marked with ashes as part of the public penitential process. Other baptized Christians began asking to receive ashes in a manner similar to catechumens and penitents. Christian men had ashes sprinkled on their heads while ashes were used to trace the cross on the forehead of women. Thus the use of ashes as the sign of penance, in readiness for Easter, was becoming a Church wide practice. During the papacy of St. Gregory the Great, the practice was further expanded and is mentioned in the sixth-century Gregorian Sacramentary. Around the year 1000, Abbot Aelfric of the monastery of Eynsham, England, wrote: "We read in the books both in the Old Law and in the new that men who repented of their sins bestowed on themselves with ashes and clothed their bodies with

sackcloth. Now let us do this little at the beginning of our Lent, that we strew ashes upon our heads, to signify that we ought to repent of our sins during the Lenten feast" ("Aelfric's Lives of Saints," 1881, p. 263). This same rite of distributing ashes on the Wednesday that begins Lent was recommended for universal use by Pope Urban II at the Synod of Benevento in 1091. So when we go to that early Mass on Ash Wednesday morning and receive the blessed ashes on our forehead, we are repeating a somber, pious act that Catholics have been undergoing for over 1,500 years. As "The Liturgical Year, Septuagesima," by Abbot Gueranger, O.S.B., written in the middle decades of the 1800s, puts it: "We are entering, today, upon a long campaign of the warfare spoke of by the apostles: forty days of battle, forty days of penance. We shall not turn cowards, if our souls can but be impressed with the conviction that the battle and the penance must be gone through. Let us listen to the eloquence of the solemn rite which opens our Lent. Let us go whither our mother leads us, that is, to the scene of the fall." Like all those before us, we unhesitatingly embrace this invitation to sanctity, this time to turn away from sin. We are part of that great cloud of witnesses who through all the ages have donned the ashes, publicly acknowledging that we are Christians, Christians who have sinned and seek to repent. We acknowledge that "we are dust and to dust we shall return."

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Stations of the Cross, also called **Way of the Cross**, a series of 14 pictures or carvings portraying events in the Passion of Christ, from His condemnation by Pontius Pilate to His entombment. The series of stations is as follows: (1) Jesus is condemned to death, (2) He is made to bear his cross, (3) He falls the first time, (4) He meets His mother, (5) Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross, (6) Veronica wipes Jesus' face, (7) He falls the second time, (8) the women of Jerusalem weep over Jesus, (9) He falls the third time, (10) He is stripped of His garments, (11) He is nailed to the cross, (12) He dies on the cross, (13) He is taken down from the cross, and (14) He is placed in the sepulchre. The images are usually mounted on the inside walls of a church or chapel but may also be erected in such places as cemeteries, corridors of hospitals and religious houses, or on mountainsides.

The devotional exercise of visiting and praying in front of each of the 14 stations and meditating on the Passion of Christ stems from the practice of early Christian pilgrims who visited the scenes of the events in Jerusalem and walked the traditional route from the supposed location of Pilate's house to Calvary. Tradition holds that Mary, the mother of Jesus, set up stone markers at her home outside Jerusalem to prayerfully retrace the steps of her son's Passion, but the origin of the devotion in its present form is not clear. The number of stations originally observed in Jerusalem was considerably smaller than 14. In the early 16th century, Ways of the Cross were established in Europe, and the tradition of 14 stations probably derived from the best known of them, that at Leuven (1505). The Franciscans long popularized the practice, and in the 18th century they bowed to Western Christian devotional feeling and provided 14 stations in Jerusalem. The traditional stations have been recently supplemented with the Via Lucis (the Way of Light), in which the meditations focus on the resurrected Christ. Prayerful meditation through the Stations of the Cross is especially common during Lent and on Fridays throughout the year, in commemoration of Christ's Crucifixion on Good Friday. The

devotion may be done individually or in a group and is particularly important in Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions. Each station is commonly visited with some variation of the prayer "We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world" and with a reading from a relevant passage of Scripture. Both St. Francis of Assisi and St. Alphonso Maria de' Ligori wrote devotional guides for the Stations of the Cross that remain popular.

CHURCH DESIGN AND FURNISHINGS Continued

Nave

Referring to the "barque of Peter" and "Noah's Ark," the word "nave" is derived from the Latin word for ship, *navis*, and has come to mean the area where the parishioners sit or stand (pews are a very late addition to the nave area, and, even today, parishioners stand during the liturgy in many Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches). In Gothic architecture, and in many of the churches that we may have grown up with in other diocese the nave had an aisle (or two) on both sides. Obviously, we do not. However, the area that is now furnished with pews, where the congregation sits is the nave of the church.

When we spoke of the atrium and narthex in the past weeks, these may still be found in some churches today. But, there has been modifications over the centuries. Here at St. Stephen, Martyr the Portico and the Commons have taken the place of these areas.



On Fridays, we refrain from eating meat since Jesus sacrificed his flesh for us on Good Friday.

WHY NO MEAT?

Why is fish permitted on Fridays?
 Fish doesn't belong to the "flesh meats." The Latin word for meat "caro," from which we get words like carnivore and carnivorous applies to flesh meat and does not include fish.

Traditionally, meat was more expensive and eaten only during times of feasting and rejoicing.

What is considered flesh meat?
 Flesh meat includes any meat from poultry or mammals, such as beef, chicken and pork. Products that come from these animals can be consumed on Fridays, such as milk and eggs.


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LENTEN WEEKDAY REFLECTIONS

The season of Lent offers the opportunity to take stock of our lives in the context of reflecting on the life of Jesus as exemplified in His death and resurrection. In this sense Lent is primarily a positive season. It affords the opportunity, the liturgical moment, to remove the clutter and return to the right path by focusing on the right target. But this does not imply a type of individual introspection. Rather we reflect on our lives in the context of our relationships with others, and getting those relationships and issues in order. For as the Son is Son precisely in relationship with His Father and Christ is life-giver by virtue of His life given in death for others, so Lent calls us be sustained and renewed as we live in terms of, and for others.

Ash Wednesday

Be reconciled to God – now is the favorable time.

Today's liturgy inaugurates the Season of Lent, a time for Christian communities to look more closely at the Gospel message and renew their commitment to follow the way of Christ, a commitment which will be promised anew at the Easter Liturgy. The reading for Ash Wednesday remind us that God is all tenderness and compassion, ready to take pity on this earth and its peoples if we really – 'with all our heart' – want to accept the message of Jesus and live by it. Each reading in its own way calls us to sincerity with God.

The first reading comes from a time when the country was devastated first by a terrible drought and then by a plague of locust. Joel calls the priests and people to repentance and envisages a solemn fast and a liturgy of lament and intercession full of hope in God. In the second reading

Paul reminds us that Christ took on our sin that we might take on God's goodness. We have only to accept the reconciliation offered and now is the time to do this. Prayer, fasting and alms-giving were good works recommended within the Jewish religion. In the Gospel, Jesus teaches His followers how to practice them not to be praised by others but to be seen and acknowledged by the Father.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

I set before you life or death Choose life then.

Deut. 30:15-20 Moses in his final address to his people, about to enter the Promised Land, places a fundamental option before the people: Choose life or death! Choose that which is life-giving and sustaining or that which deals death and perishes

Lk. 9:22-25 This is Luke's first Passion Prediction. The suffering destiny of Jesus is plainly stated and the disciples are then challenged to boldly pattern their life after the model of Jesus.

Those who know the law of God have two ways open to them to love God and follow in the ways of God or to let themselves follow the attraction of powers – and today there are many – other than those of justice, love and lasting life.

The Gospel puts before us the harsh destiny of Jesus and the daily demands of following Him. But to lose one's life for the sake of Jesus is in fact to save it just as His sacrifice of life was followed by resurrection.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

The fast that pleases Me – to share your bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor.

Is. 58:1-9 The people ask why the Lord seems unresponsive to their religious fasting. The response is because it is a ritual fasting that lacks justice. Instead, 'fasting' from injustice and maliciousness finds God's favor.

Mt. 9:14-15 Jesus is challenged for not imposing fasting on His disciples after the manner of John the Baptist. Using the biblical image of the wedding banquet (an image of salvation) Jesus responds that only when the groom (Jesus) is taken away is there reason for mourning.

The poetic first reading contrasts the people who seek integrity with God through prayer, fasting and knowledge of the law, with God who seeks to integrate the hungry, the homeless and the oppressed into the community. Those who seek God are asked here not to afflict themselves with fasting but with the affliction of those who suffer poverty and oppression. To alleviate this is the fast God desires.

In the Gospel Jesus tells His questioners that there will be times when fasting is appropriate, but the initial experience of His message with its power to heal and liberate is not such a moment.

It is good to savor the joy of celebration as God's gift to us.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

I have not come to call the virtuous but sinners.

Is. 58:9-14 Continuing on from the previous text in Isaiah, we get the up-side of God's reaction to a people that acts in justice. God will be for them (for us) as light in darkness, as restorer of the broken

Lk. 5:27-32 Jesus is challenged by those who deemed themselves righteous for associating with the wrong irreligious types (tax collectors and non-observers of the Law). But it is precisely for such people that Jesus has come.

Jesus lived in a culture in which there were clear rules of association. One was readily categorized a sinner and often so merely due to circumstance (birth or job). Sin was viewed as a type of contagion (impurity) and to preserve righteousness one avoided occasions of contamination. Also to mix with such people was to become contaminated (guilt by association), and to challenge such taboos was often done at personal risk. Jesus' action of table-fellowship shows the inclusive nature of God's love over sectarian human prejudice.

PRAYERS FOR LENT

Lenten Prayer for Ash Wednesday

God of goodness and mercy,

Hear my prayer as I begin this Lenten journey with you. Let me be honest with myself as I look into my heart and soul, noticing the times I turn away from you. Guide me as I humbly seek to repent and return to your love.

May humility guide my efforts to be reconciled with you and live forever in your abundant grace.

Transform me this Lent, heavenly Father. Give me the strength to commit myself to grow closer to you each day.

Amen.

Let Us Fast

While fasting with the body,

brothers and sisters,

let us also fast in spirit.

Let us lose every bond of iniquity;

let us undo the knots of every contact made by violence;

let us tear up all unjust agreements;

let us give bread to the hungry

and welcome to our house

the poor who have no roof to cover them,

that we may receive mercy from Christ our God.

Byzantine Vespers

The Fast Life

Fast from judging others;

Feast on Christ dwelling in them.

Fast from fear of illness;
Feast on the healing power of God.
Fast from words that pollute;
Feast on speech that purifies.
Fast from discontent;
Feast on gratitude.
Fast from anger;
Feast on patience.
Fast from pessimism;
Feast on hope.
Fast from negatives;
Feast on encouragement.
Fast from bitterness;
Feast on forgiveness.
Fast from self-concern;
Feast on compassion.
Fast from suspicion;
Feast on truth.
Fast from gossip;
Feast on purposeful silence.
Fast from problems that overwhelm;
Feast on prayer that sustains.
Fast from anxiety;
Feast on faith.

Author Unknown

PASTOR'S SCHEDULE EVENTS WEEK OF 22 - 29 FEB

Saturday 22 Feb

8:30 a.m. Mass
10:00 a.m. Baptism
1:30 p.m. Confession
5:00 p.m. Vigil Mass 7th Sunday Ordinary Time
7:00 p.m. Chilli Cook-off

Sunday 23 Feb 7th Sunday Ordinary Time

7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m. Rite of Election RCIA, 11:30 a.m. Masses
8:00 p.m. Mass Brig

Monday 24 Feb Day Off

8:30 a.m. Mass
10:00 a.m. Appointment

Tuesday 25 Feb

8:30 a.m. Mass

7:00 p.m. Parish Council

ASH WEDNESDAY 26 FEB

6:30 a.m. Mass Distribution of Ashes

7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Confessions

8:30 a.m. Mass Distribution of Ashes

12 Noon Mass Distribution of Ashes

2:00 p.m. Brig Mass Distribution of Ashes

7:00 p.m. Mass Distribution of Ashes

Thursday 27 Feb

6:30 a.m. Mass

7:00 a.m. Confession

8:30 a.m. Mass

5:00 p.m. Confessions

6:30 p.m. Mass

7:00 p.m. RCIA

Friday 28 Feb

6:30 a.m. Mass

7:00 a.m. Confession

8:30 a.m. Mass

5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Adoration & Confessions

7:00 p.m. Stations of the Cross

Saturday 29 Feb

8:30 a.m. Mass

9:00 a.m. Meeting

1:00 -4:30 p.m. Confessions

5:00 p.m. Vigil Mass First Sunday of Lent

Sunday 1 Mar First Sunday of Lent

7:00 a.m. 8:30 a.m. 11:30 a.m. Masses

8:00 p.m. Mass Brig

February 17, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As bishop of Richmond, one of my significant pastoral responsibilities is to reach out to victim survivors of clergy sexual abuse, and to be a resource for them on their paths of healing. To that end, I am announcing the next step in honoring this commitment. Beginning today, the Catholic Diocese of Richmond is establishing an Independent Reconciliation Program to assist in the healing of those who were sexually abused as minors by Catholic clergy.

Reconciliation is a complex matter. The Sacrament of Confession, for example, is intended to reconcile us with the Lord. Yet, the sacrament requires more than just identifying and apologizing for sins. There is an element of the sacrament that demands steps be taken toward repairing the damage that has been done. We must identify these sins, express contrition for them, and offer some form of recompense.

On September 14, 2018, during our Mass of Atonement at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, I stated, “to those who experienced abuse: Christ hears you. The Body of Christ suffers with you. The Church hears you, hears your cries, and desires to respond in charity and in justice to those cries.”

As your bishop, I have personally heard those cries. I have met with and learned from victim survivors of clergy sexual abuse – hearing first-hand the enormously profound impact these grave violations of sacred trust have had on their lives. Since my installation and in keeping with my pledge to promote healing, I have taken a number of steps including: the Masses of Atonement and regional listening sessions, publishing a list of clergy against whom there have been credible and substantiated allegations of sexual abuse and instituting the diocese’s building-naming policy.

We have watched as dioceses throughout the country have embraced reconciliation programs similar to this program and noted the benefit to victim survivors. This program – designed and managed by a nationally recognized and highly respected, independent claims administrator – gives victim survivors an opportunity to receive monetary payment in a manner that is compassionate. The program is completely voluntary. To learn more about the program, visit:

[Richmond Diocese IRP](#)

We will never be able to fully compensate for the harm done and we recognize there are many routes that might be followed to achieve justice. We believe this to be the best course for our diocese to reach a just reconciliation with our victim survivors.

I ask for your continued prayers for victim survivors, that in their healing they find comfort and peace.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Barry C. Knestout

Bishop Barry C. Knestout