



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Lent 2024

*“In the heart of the Church, I will be Love”.*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Traditionally, Valentine’s Day falls on February 14 each year. It expresses the emotions and feelings of love through romance and gift giving. It is a secular celebration of love.

This year, Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day share the same day. Many will not know this fact, others will ignore it, and some may be upset because they have to fast and abstain from meat on this day.

Rather than seeing these two events in opposition, we can consider them to be complimentary if we consider that they both focus on love. Valentine’s Day deals with the emotional aspect or sentiments of love while Lent focus on its essence. One is temporal the other is spiritual.

Ash Wednesday and Lent teach us that the true nature of love is found in sacrifice and self-denial. We see this in the life and teaching of Jesus as found in Sacred Scripture.

In the Gospel for the Mass of Ash Wednesday, Jesus focuses on the importance of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These three are considered the pillars of Lent. Jesus teaches us that it is through our acts of self sacrifice that we grow in love. We deny ourselves because we love.

On the First Sunday of Lent, we read in the Gospel of St. Mark that Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days where he was tempted by Satan. Our Lord was spiritually preparing Himself to ultimately give His life for our salvation. His entire public ministry was a journey to the cross. By His suffering and death, Jesus shows us that the greatest act of love is found in sacrifice (John 15:13).

In her autobiography, “A Story of a Soul”, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, tells us that it was only after a great deal of prayer and reflection that God revealed to her that she was called to be love. She states, “At last I have found my vocation. In the heart of the Church, I will be Love!” Let us not forget that this is also our vocation. Every baptised Christian is called to love like Christ.

During Lent, as we join Jesus in the wilderness, let us move from mere sentiment to the essence of love. May all of our sacrifices, acts of prayer, self-denial and generosity always be motivated by and inspire love. This is what our world desperately needs today.

Together, let us joyfully set the Diocese of St. Catharines on fire with God's love remembering the words of St. Thérèse, "In the heart of the Church, I will be Love".

With prayers for a blessed Lent, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gerard Bergie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.  
Bishop of St. Catharines