



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

February 17, 2026

To the Faithful of the Diocese of Hamilton
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Return to me with all your heart... for I am gracious and merciful” (Jl 2:12–13).

With these words from the prophet Joel, the Church opens the holy season of Lent. They are words of invitation—an appeal from the heart of God to each one of us. As we begin this sacred time—my first Lent with you as your Bishop—I receive these words personally, and I offer them to you as well.

In his Lenten Message for 2026, Pope Leo XIV reminds us that every journey of conversion begins by letting the Word of God touch our hearts and by relearning the art of listening. Lent, he writes, is a time to “*place the mystery of God back at the centre of our lives.*” These words beautifully echo the call of the prophet: to return with all our heart.

In the afterglow of the beautiful Installation Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of Christ the King just two weeks ago, I concluded my homily with questions that remain with me still: How do we recognize God’s presence in our daily lives? Do we truly long for justice and peace? Are we attentive to the new people and situations God places before us? Through our words and actions, do we bring hope? Are we living the Gospel as Good News—news that brings joy, life, and light?

Lent gives us the grace to reflect more deeply on these questions.

On Ash Wednesday, we receive the cross in ashes upon our foreheads. That small cross proclaims that our faith is not confined to church walls. It is meant to be lived in our homes, workplaces, schools, and communities. We are reminded of our frailty— “Remember that you are dust...” (Gn 3:19)—and of the urgent call to hope: “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). Lent is the “acceptable time,” the “day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). It is a season of grace, a time to begin again.

Reconciliation stands at the heart of our journey. We seek it not only as individuals, but within our families, parishes, and wider community. Before approaching the altar, we are called to be at peace with one another (Mt 5:23–24). Perhaps the Lord is inviting us to mend a strained relationship, to offer or to ask forgiveness—even “seventy-seven times” (Mt 18:22). In this way, our homes become places where Christ’s light truly dwells. As the Holy Father also notes, conversion touches not only our conscience but the quality of our relationships and dialogue.

Saint Matthew’s Gospel presents the three pillars of Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

“Whenever you pray... your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:6).

Prayer deepens our relationship with the Father. This Lent, we might set aside a few more moments each day for quiet conversation with God, rediscover Sunday Mass with renewed devotion, attend a weekday Mass, or pray the *Via Crucis* with our parish or as a family. In the spirit of the Pope’s invitation to listen, *we can embrace moments of silence, opening our hearts to the way God’s Word gently speaks within us.*

“When you fast... your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:17–18).

Fasting teaches us freedom. By freely giving something up, we remember that “one does not live by bread alone” (Mt 4:4). The Holy Father reminds us that fasting expands our hearts and even calls us to refrain from words that wound. *We are called to speak thoughtfully, refrain from harsh judgment, and nurture kindness* in our families and communities.

“When you give alms... your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:3–4).

Almsgiving flows from compassion. In caring for “the least of these” (Mt 25:40), we serve Christ Himself. Listening to the Word must also mean listening to the cry of the poor and responding with generosity and justice.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation holds a special place in this season. In Confession, there is a confession of praise, a confession of sin, and a confession of faith—trusting that Christ, who “will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21), has conquered sin and death. Here we encounter not judgment, but mercy.

The Beatitudes (Mt 5:1–12) remain our guide: “Blessed are the merciful... Blessed are the peacemakers.” They gently invite us to examine our lives: Am I humble? Am I merciful? Do I seek peace? Jesus not only teaches these blessings—He lives them and shares His life with us.

Lent is a journey we make together. As your Bishop, I walk it with you—as a fellow pilgrim in need of God’s mercy and grace. I carry you in my prayer each day, and I ask you to pray for me. In the words of the Holy Father, may this be a Lent that leads us to greater attentiveness to God and to one another, so that our communities become places where hope and reconciliation flourish.

May our families grow stronger in faith, our parishes become places of reconciliation and joy, and our Diocese shine ever more brightly with the light of Christ.

“Return to me with all your heart” (Jl 2:12). May this be our shared response to the Lord’s loving invitation. I wish you all a blessed and fruitful Lenten journey.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+Joseph Dabrowski

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