

**Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.**  
**Ash Wednesday, 2018**



On Monday evening I completed my pastoral visitation in Colorado and flew back to DC yesterday morning. This morning I awoke in my own bed momentarily confused: where am I and where am I supposed to be and when?

The realization that I was back at the Edwin Cardinal O'Brien Pastoral Center and due at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center this morning came very quickly. I also remembered that the poinsettia plants, which thrived this year, were still in the main chapel at the pastoral center. As I removed them I hoped that someone might want to replant them outside. They are still flowering and vibrant.

The image is a good one for us as we begin these forty days of our annual retreat. We take time so as to revitalize our faith and experience the abiding presence of Almighty God. With the prophet Joel we know that "the Lord was stirred to concern for His land and took pity on His people." (Jl 2:18). Time and again we have witnessed this concern and also been instruments of it in this place of healing and active concern.

Ten years ago I established this hospital, albeit in a different location, as the AMS station gathering for the beginning of Lent. Ten years does not compare with the centuries that Santa Sabina has been the station for the Church at Rome on Ash Wednesday, but in our relatively young nation, it is still significant.

We hear the Word of God today as an invitation to authentic renewal to intensify our relationship with the Lord and to look with renewed vigor on our daily routine. Pope Francis guides us with his invitation: "Above all, I urge the members of the Church to take up the Lenten journey with enthusiasm, sustained by almsgiving, fasting and prayer. If, at times, the flame of charity seems to die in our own hearts, know that this is never the case in the heart of God! He constantly gives us a chance to begin loving anew."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Message for Lent, 2018, 1.XI.17.

Let not the acceptable time announced by St. Paul to the Church at Corinth pass us by. Let us look forward in hope to a significant period of renewal during which we verify our path and check the general direction of the course. While the position of the mountain range around Colorado Springs helps you to find your bearings, I usually appreciate a directional indicator in the vehicle to tell me if I am heading north or south. This most recent rental vehicle did not have one or at least I did not find it in ten days of driving.

In Lent the directional indicators are omnipresent. Keeping in mind the constant fidelity and love of Almighty God, look at Lent as that opportunity to check the course we have charted and verify our position. It is a time when grace abounds and the opportunity to overcome the enemy forces is certain. Then access to the lasting treasure is never in doubt.

Again Pope Francis offers us wise counsel: “False prophets can also be ‘charlatans’, who offer easy and immediate solutions to suffering that soon prove utterly useless. How many young people are taken in by the panacea of drugs, of disposable relationships, of easy but dishonest gains! How many more are ensnared in a thoroughly ‘virtual’ existence, in which relationships appear quick and straightforward, only to prove meaningless! These swindlers, in peddling things that have no real value, rob people of all that is most precious: dignity, freedom and the ability to love. They appeal to our vanity, our trust in appearances, but in the end they only make fools of us. Nor should we be surprised. In order to confound the human heart, the devil, who is ‘a liar and the father of lies’ (*Jn 8:44*), has always presented evil as good, falsehood as truth. That is why each of us is called to peer into our heart to see if we are falling prey to the lies of these false prophets. We must learn to look closely, beneath the surface, and to recognize what leaves a good and lasting mark on our hearts, because it comes from God and is truly for our benefit.”<sup>2</sup>

External signs help us to remember what we are about for the next six weeks. “We receive ashes and we recall that authentic liturgical rites must manifest interior dispositions and intentions. The Gospel speaks about attitudes and interior integrity. We can purify our intentions through our intimacy with the Father. Perhaps the desire to be seen and to be praised for our piety is less of a danger now than in an earlier time, but it must still be watched and kept under control.

“The Lord asks us to do good because He is good and to live in secret where the Father sees us, loves us and waits for us. He calls His disciples to a justice superior to the expectations of the scribes and the Pharisees—that is to say in our time, the world. Therefore, we are called to be vigilant over our intentions. Lent is a time to examine intentions and purify them.”<sup>3</sup>

The winter Olympics offer a good analogy. We know how diligently the athletes train to participate and do their best in those competitions. The best athletes in the world still

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Broglio, homily at WRAMC on Ash Wednesday, 2008.

have to train, practice, stay in shape, and be ready. Lent is our annual Olympic training, but the rewards are not gold medals that can be stolen or lost, but rather the precious rewards of everlasting life.

I would invite you also to see in your current experience at this immense medical center your opportunity to be renewed. As a patient you can view your experience in relation to the suffering of Christ. That helps us endure the present moment and see in it a tie to the greatest love the world has ever known. If you are a physician, nurse, medical professional, administrator, or part of the supporting staff in one way or another, see in those duties and responsibilities an opportunity to walk with Christ the healer, the consoler, and the humble One who never disdained His participation in the human condition.

In both cases your situation is not easy: both the one who suffers and the one who assists needs to experience the presence of Christ who walks with you. Lent invites you to see Him and to rejoice in His solidarity. His love will always flower, even if the poinsettias fade and the lilies are not quite ready. He is there if we look for Him and cultivate His presence.

We receive ashes today to remind us of our mortality, but also to highlight the possibility of conversion, reform, and renewal. "Now is the acceptable time...now is the day of salvation."