



March 5, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Disciples All in Christ Jesus,

The title of my recent letter on the New Evangelization is "Go Forth with Hearts on Fire." For whom are our hearts on fire? Our hearts are on fire with love for God, made visible in Jesus Christ; for our fellow disciples who form the Body of Christ, His Church; and for all the members of the human family, who are likewise brothers and sisters to us. But, in fact, are these hearts of ours truly on fire? Or are they lukewarm, or, worse yet, nearly burned out?

Wherever our hearts are on the spectrum: from aflame with love to nearly burned out, God in His ever faithful and never-changing love for us gives our hearts the season of Lent to be set on fire with His love. Since the heart is the symbol of the human person, you and I, along with all who form our diocesan family, are the ones being invited to journey through these forty days of Lent with an open and willing spirit to be so filled with his living presence that we shall go forth beyond Lent with hearts on fire for the ongoing mission of the New Evangelization.

The New Evangelization itself is a call to be re-evangelized ourselves while at the same time to evangelize others. Unless our own hearts are on fire with love which comes from Christ's Heart, we will not be able to invite others to come to Jesus, either for the first time or after time being away in a kind of spiritual desert.

In the three principal works of Lent – prayer, fasting and other forms of penance, and almsgiving – we are given the means with which to allow the fire of love from the Heart of Christ to set our hearts on fire.

Prayer is, basically, our responding to God, Who is speaking to our hearts. Prayer takes on various forms. We reflect on His Word in the Scriptures, or we offer prayers so very familiar to us since childhood, or we take part in *Lectio Divina*, or we experience the Lord Jesus embracing us through those outward signs called sacraments, especially Penance and Holy Eucharist. Whatever the form, we are, in fact, opening our very being – symbolized by the heart – to God's transforming touch. Our hearts are being filled with God's loving presence.

Fasting or other forms of penance provide us with a kind of self-discipline which, in effect, frees us from whatever has been enslaving us and strengthens our wills to do good and to reject evil. Fasting and other forms of penance also enable us to make reparation for our sins and the sins of others. In this way, our hearts beat with greater freedom to love as Christ desires that we love. These same hearts also beat with sorrow and reparation for past sinfulness.

Almsgiving means reaching out with acts of charity, especially to those most needy around us and beyond us. Love of God, if it is authentic, must also include love for all people, especially the ones who truly are in need. When our hearts are aflame with God's love, they are also aflame with the kind of love that is able to respond to those who are in trouble and afflicted in any way, and to sacrifice for them. Taking part in the Operation Rice Bowl initiative or in other programs and projects of Catholic Charities are two tangible ways to give alms. Thus, almsgiving is truly real in hearts on fire with love.

Yes, this Lenten season is a grace-filled time for each one of us to be transformed as our hearts are set on fire with God's love, a love we shall more faithfully return to him and more willingly give to others.

I wish each of you a blessed Lent. Please know that you are in my daily prayers as I hope to be in yours, so that together, we can go forth with hearts on fire with love.

Faithfully in the Heart of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul S. Loverde". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde
Bishop of Arlington