

Letter from Bishop Wayne Kirkpatrick, Lent 2021

Trappist Monk Thomas Merton wrote the following prayer of Abandonment; it is a good prayer for this Season of Lent taken from his book, *Thoughts in Solitude* written in 1958.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that, if I do this,
You will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore, I will trust you always
though I may seem to be lost
and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.



How do we know whether we are on the right path or not? How do we know whether we are spiritually and emotionally healthy or sick? How do we know whether we are focused or scattered and divided? The distractions of life can keep us from fully asking these types of questions yet asking them is essential if we are going to grow. Spiritual people from the earliest days of faith have found incredible wisdom and insight after spending time in the desert. Jesus and others have sought out the space of the desert to confront their fears, temptations and weaknesses.

This Season of Lent affords us the opportunity to detach, unplug, disconnect and find an experience of desert. In many ways, by being isolated from family and friends we have been undergoing our own desert experience this past year in dealing with this pandemic. It has helped us to focus on what is most important in our lives – our faith and our family.

Detaching a bit from the normal stuff of life and creating a little desert space to be alone teaches us that we cannot control everything that happens to us or fix everything that is broken. Our world teaches us that it is all about us – our goals, our happiness, our needs, our wants, our accomplishments, our successes, our failures. We live in a world of ‘me and I’ but it is not about

you or me it is about God. Our lives are about finding the path to our God our creator. When we abandon ourselves in complete trust to God, we no longer have to worry whether we are on the right road, heading in the right direction for in addition to knowing that we are loved by God we will also know that we are being led by God and by God's GPS – God's plan for salvation.

The challenge placed before us during this holy Season of Lent is clearly and concisely expressed in the gospel. Repent and believe in the Good News. The call to repentance is a call for change, a change for the better. We are invited to recognize the need for change in our lives.

Traditionally we have been taught that the Season of Lent is a time set aside for fasting, almsgiving and prayer. The exercise of these virtues keeps us close to God and keeps us focused on service to others. Fasting is an act of self-denial and a way of directing our thoughts away from ourselves and towards our God. Almsgiving is the act by which we give of ourselves in order to assist someone in need. Prayer should be the centre of our Christian lives lifting up our hearts in praise and thanksgiving to our God who loves us.

In his Lenten Letter, Pope Francis said, "Dear brothers and sisters, every moment of our lives is a time for believing, hoping and loving. The call to experience Lent as a journey of conversion, prayer and sharing of our goods, helps us – as communities and as individuals – to revive the faith that comes from the living Christ, the hope inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit and the love flowing from the merciful heart of the Father."

Mindful of our God and our family, we are a people of faith who have travelled a difficult road this past year. Like Thomas Merton and very much like St. Joseph whom we honour during this special year dedicated to him, we often do not know where we are going, are unable to see the road ahead of us but we trust in God's goodness and love. This Season of Lent helps us to realize that we are not alone on that journey – our God is with us always. May we recognize this Season of Lent as a spiritual journey reminding us of who we are and where we have come from and where we hope to be at journeys end – resting with our God.

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