

Dear Friends in Christ,

“Return to me with your whole heart...” the Lord lovingly cried out to us this past Ash Wednesday through His prophet Joel. Another Lenten Season has begun, and God’s infinite grace is poured upon us again, to strengthen, purify and renew us in our relationship with Him as His beloved children.

As I was proclaiming the Ash Wednesday Gospel this year, the words about the Heavenly Father kept ringing in my heart: “...and **your Father** who sees in secret will repay you.” All of our Lenten practices, all that we are and all that we do, are for the glory of our Father in Heaven.

This reality hit me hard in recent weeks as I was dealing with something that was extremely frustrating and out of my control. My raw instinct was to step out and take control of it, making it fit and work the way *I wanted* it to work. It’s amazing how we can sometimes be willing to compromise our witness when things just don’t go our way. Well eventually I took this to prayer and picked up a book, “The Soul of the Apostolate,” and read:

“Only our Lord is capable of raising up this wreck. ‘Get up,’ He says to the discouraged apostle, ‘and instead of acting alone, take to your work again, but with Me, in Me, and by Me’” (Jean-Baptiste Chautard, 103).

The author also writes:

“He [the apostle] has no trouble subordinating all his projects and hopes to the unfathomable designs of a God who often uses failure even better than success to bring about the good of souls” (Chautard, 101).

The Lord in His goodness gently reminded that my whole life is about Him. My life, my ministry is all about Him. All I am called to do is to be faithful and abide in Him. That doesn’t mean that we don’t work as if everything depended upon us, it just means that *He is the very reason why we labor for our young people*. Lent helps us to get back to the basics, to strip off the false comforts and idols that we accumulate and use to find happiness. As challenging as Lent is for all of us, it is a wonderful grace that can help us to re-align our spiritual compass.

Last weekend I was in Louisiana for the Baptism of a friend’s baby. Taking advantage of the trip I spent a few extra days just enjoying the company of friends and taking some time for myself. It was so rewarding. Making time for leisure, as challenging as it is, gives us a wonderful opportunity to step back and look at where we have been and where we are going. To be renewed and prepared to reengage in the business of our lives. I can begin to understand why the Lord gave us the Sabbath!

Interestingly enough, on my way back home I was reading an address that Pope Benedict had given at the Major Pontifical Seminary in Rome. This quote resonated with my experience:

...it is not we who must achieve what God expects from the world; rather, we must first of all enter into the ontological mystery of God’s giving of Himself. His being,

His love, precede our action and, in the context of His Body, in the context of being in Him and identified with Him, ennobled with His Blood, we too can act with Christ” (Pope Benedict XVI).

As we pour out our lives in service to the young people in our care, I pray that all of us can find that special time to step back and “just be...” in Him, with Him.

Recognizing this need and the need to gather in fellowship with the leaders of young people in the Archdiocese, we will be sponsoring monthly gatherings so that we may be fed (mind, heart and hands), reenergized and refocused for the great service to which the Lord has called us.

The gatherings will rotate between parishes and the pastoral center, and feature different speakers and topics that address the needs and concerns of those serving young people. The evenings will provide a balance between prayer, fellowship and the theme of the night.

I am so happy to announce that our first gathering will be

Tuesday March 23rd @ 7:00pm
Pastoral Center, Braintree
Featuring Fr. Bill Kelly
“Speak Lord. Your Servant is Really Listening”

Fr. Kelly, who serves the priests and deacons of the Archdiocese in the Office for Clergy Support and Ongoing Formation, and who has been a spiritual director for the seminarians of St. John’s for fifteen years, will speak to us about prayer and the importance of spiritual direction. *We hope to provide a reference list of people who offer spiritual direction.*

We will also be gathering on:

Tuesday, April 20th, 1:00 – 2:30pm at St. Patrick Parish, Stoneham

Tuesday, May 18th, 7:00 – 8:30pm at The Pastoral Center, Braintree

From my personal experiences and from my conversations with many of you, I know how hard you work and the many challenges that you all face. I also know (personally) that we can’t give what we don’t have. As one of your priests and shepherds, I do care about you, your spiritual well-being, and the young people whom you serve. As I mentioned earlier, we are often pouring ourselves out for our young people, *this night is an opportunity for you to receive and be blessed.* Please come and join us.

Ideas and Opportunities for our Young People:

Lenten Cross Training – This Lent consider inviting your teens to wear their crucifix in a visible way throughout the season. This simple action will have many benefits: a) the Crucifix will remind you each day that Christ gave His life on the Cross out of love for you and the whole world; b) the Crucifix will be a public witness to your faith and an opportunity to give a reason for the hope you have in Christ (1Pet 3:4-17); c) The Crucifix will be a daily reminder to pray for all people to find God and have peace when God is found. In preparing our young people to be witnesses, we could ask them to pray and think about how they would answer these questions: “I follow Jesus because”...? “I am Catholic because”....; and The goal in being a witness is to share the joy and hope that Christ and His Church have been and continues to be in their lives.

Awards banquet- Yes it is that time of year again. Please go to our website to see the latest information on how you can nominate an adult, young adult, or youth who has made a powerful impact in your community.

Labels Are For Jars: This great ministry out of St. Patrick’s in Lawrence, under the direction of Fr. Paul O’Brien, has been a tremendous gift to serving the poor in that city. Its mission is to “to remove the ‘hungry’ label in two ways. We want to remove the societal label...and we want to feed hungry people in Lawrence, Massachusetts.” It’s a great charity to keep in mind as your young people embrace their Lenten practices. Check out their website: <http://www.labelsareforjars.org>

Please know that you are in our daily prayers. We look forward to being with you soon.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Matt Williams

P.S. Please stay tuned to www.ovmboston.org for forthcoming information as we research, create and roll out our response options for our young people to help our Haitian brothers and sisters.