

As we begin the Season of Lent this year, we are aware that many Canadians are carrying a heavy load of worry, fear and uncertainty about the future. We are facing an early federal election as well as living under the threat of significant tariffs from our largest trading partner, the United States.

We are grateful for our political leaders who are seeking out every avenue to avert a costly trade war. We pray for their wisdom and courage in the face of what some may regard as unwarranted aggression. It is our hope that we can attain a fair equilibrium between our two countries to sustain a spirit of friendship and partnership such as we have nurtured for over a century.

Though our times may be experienced as harrowing and distressing, it is a comfort to know that we are not alone when we seek what is right and good. We have the assurance that God walks with us. That was the faith of the Psalmist as he looked back on his checkered life and experience. We read in Psalm 90[89].1,2 (NRSV UE). *Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.* That is the conviction which undergirds us in these uncertain times.

As Christians, we are deeply committed to Christ, and his teachings about the Reign of God where many of the values of this world are turned upside down. The good news of God's love for us, draws us to live by the values of justice, peace, solidarity, reconciliation, and the well-being of others. We are called to care for the least among us, in our own country and around the world.

In a democracy, and in an election year, it is important to engage in our civic duty to vote. We need to vote thoughtfully and carefully. In this respect, the Council has resources which you may find helpful. We also wish to affirm our political leaders, and that we deeply appreciate how difficult is their calling.

For many Christians, the Season of Lent is a holy time in which we are invited to turn and return to God. In some Western Christian traditions, the journey to Easter begins with the sign of ashes – an ancient sign that speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life. And then, rather than being discouraged by the reality of sin in our world and in our own lives, we observe a season of self-examination and penitence, prayer and fasting, works of love, and reading and meditating on the Word of God.

The sign of the cross on our heads, made with ashes, is a rich symbol which also reminds us that we belong to God, and we are in God's care, and he invites us to join in his mission. As the Season progresses and the days lengthen, we are assured of Christ's light and love, and ultimately God's power over hatred, division, violence and death itself.

Prayer

O God, you came into our world to save us, but we were mired in our evil ways and nailed you to a cross. You came to show us how to live, but we have muted your teaching in our hearts and allowed ourselves to be captivated by greed and self-interest. We know too well the folly of

these errant passions. Wean us, we pray, from an over-dependence on material things for our happiness, and the misapprehension that they alone can produce contentment and fulfilment in our lives.

We confess to you our anxiety and worry about profound uncertainty in the politics of our continent and our world. Our hearts are breaking for the people affected by unjust policies and those losing their homes, jobs, and sense of security. We are more concerned than ever for our brothers and sisters in the crossfire of war or violent conflict, as well as people affected by cuts to programs serving those in greatest need. We pray for our political leaders in Canada and for leaders around the world, that they may persevere towards justice and peace for all people.

O God, even when we experience hardship, save us from the dark hole of bitterness so that when a better day arrives, we can experience the joy of restoration and rectified relationships. May we appreciate as Canadians, how blessed we are, for the enviable material wealth we possess, the beauty of the land which stretches across a continent and the delightful diversity of the peoples and cultures who make up our nation. In our differences may we be kind, in our triumphs may we be humble, in our defeats may we not give in to despair.

In this Season of Lent, slow us down to find your will and the strength and the resources to live on a higher plane and to love what matters. Help us to understand that the dimensions of your concern and reign, far exceed the boundaries of what we call our country. May the pressures we are enduring not cause us to narrow our interests or lose our moral compass but rather motivate us to be a good neighbour to all people and to respond to need wherever it may be found, so that when our work is done, we may merit your words to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant." We pray in the name of Jesus, our Saviour and our Lord, who taught us to pray in this way:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

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