

Lenten message from bishop Bernt Eidsvig 2014

Dear faithful!

In the Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday, Jesus tells us that we should not give in order to be seen, that we should not do good deeds in order that others may see them, and that we should not pray for the sake of appearances. We are to give in secret, and we will receive gratitude from our Father in heaven, who sees what is done in secret. In addition, when we pray, we should go into our room, close the door, and pray to our Father who sees what is hidden.



Our culture is often exhibitionistic, and it considers it important to be noticed. Being noticed is often juxtaposed with having value. We are told we must achieve, and market who we are and what we can do.

We are supposed to be beautiful and successful; our competence should be put on display for everyone to see. Even in ecclesiastical contexts, it is important for people that their goodness is seen, that others recognize who they are and what they do.

This is human, and we all need to be noticed and appreciated. However, in our time it seems as though this need has gotten out of hand. When human value is so easily placed on an equal footing with appearances, in our world, it is easy to lose sight of what makes humanity valuable at a fundamental level, namely that each person is created and loved by God. We are unique, and in and of ourselves we are valuable, independently of how much external value we create.

We must therefore balance our need for external validation with another need within us: our need to feel an inner certainty that we are loved and accepted by God, and by those whom we treasure.

For this reason, I encourage everyone to use part of this Lenten period to look inwards. Do not be overly concerned with whether or not others notice you. Do not chase recognition and applause. Instead, let us strive for discovering God's loving gaze within ourselves. Moreover, let us open our eyes to all those whom the world does not see: those who are poor, unborn children, illegal immigrants, victims of trafficking, the lonely woman in our neighborhood, the boy that nobody wants to play with. Let us try to notice the people who will not increase our status in society when they are seen with us.

Lent summons us to fasting, prayer and almsgiving. This year, I would especially like to ask all of you to unite your fasting and prayers with our suffering sisters and brothers in the Ukraine. The head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, the largest of the eastern Churches in communion with Rome, has asked everyone to fast and pray for lasting peace and justice in the country, and I would like to implore all of you to unite your own fasting and prayers with these, our sisters and brothers.

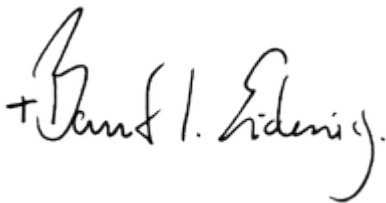
Despite the fact that Lent emphasizes renunciation and penance, it is not a time for sorrow. Instead,

it is a time for new beginnings. It is therefore very fitting that the feast of the Annunciation is celebrated within the Lenten period this year, on the 25th of March. This day marks the Day for Life in the worldwide Church, and this year we will celebrate it for the first time in the Catholic diocese of Oslo. It is a day when we thank God for the life he has given us, for the beauty around us, and most of all, for the opportunity people receive to live in communion with God. I would encourage all of you to use this day to give thanks for the life you have been given, to pray that life should be appreciated in and of itself, and not merely because of what it produces, and to contribute to creating a society which cultivates human life, even in its most delicate phases.

This year, as every year, I would like to encourage you to give a generous gift to Caritas Norway's Lenten campaign, which is called "Shared responsibility for a better future". By giving to Caritas, we contribute to a strengthening of the Church's social engagement, and we may feel confident that the funds will reach their intended goal. This year I would also like to endorse the organization "Menneskeverd", "Human Value". This is a non-denominational Christian organization, which focuses its attention on protecting human life from conception until natural death, primarily through educational work and lobbying.

This year we are celebrating a Year of the Family in the Catholic diocese of Oslo. We give special attention to the family as the context for everyday faith. It is not easy to find time for prayer and silence in our hectic daily lives, but often it is even more important to send a short thought to God, or to quickly thank God for something we have received. I would therefore advise you to set aside a few minutes for daily common prayer in your homes. Pray before meals, hold evening prayers together, pray a decade of the Rosary, read the Gospel reading of the day, or use a few minutes in silence in front of a lit candle and a sacred image or a statue. Prayer strengthens families and fellowships. What is most important is how regularly we set aside time to pray, rather than the length of the time allotted.

And so, I wish all of you a blessed Lent. May it be a time when we all look inwards to meet God's gaze, and outside ourselves to find the unnoticed. Moreover, may we all learn not to look for external recognition.

+  I. Eide