



DIOCESE OF FALL RIVER
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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Dear Friends in Christ,

The holy season of Lent gives us Christians a time to prepare for the celebration of our Lord's victory over sin and death at Easter. During this period, the Church calls us to conversion and renewal. In addition to the traditional means—more fervent prayer, self-denial, and sharing with the needy—we also turn to the Sacraments so that we may draw closer to God.

The Sacraments are not empty rituals, but encounters with the living God. They communicate their transformative power and give grace through concrete signs: bread, wine, water, and oil, just to name a few. Perhaps less obvious, the signs of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are the confession of sins by the penitent and the absolution given by the priest. This Sacrament, in particular, can offer us help during Lent. It restores and strengthens our relationship with Christ and the Church through the forgiveness of sins.

In the Gospel on the Fourth Sunday of Lent this year, we hear the parable of the Prodigal Son (cf. Lk 15:11-32). Jesus tells the story of a son estranged from his father, his family, and his home. Far away and alone in a foreign country, the son finds himself separated from all support. When his fortune simply runs out, his great adventure turns to disaster; and, he almost perishes. Regretfully, the son's departure had occurred in such a way as to make any return very difficult. With no other choice, however, he heads home seeking nothing from his father except to save his life. Yet, he is surprised to find that his father still loves him. He is embraced, forgiven, and reinstated as part of the family. This parable teaches us the great mercy that God the Father has for each one of us and the ardent desire he has for us to return to him, to abide with him, and to grow closer to him.

On March 19-20, the Diocese of Fall River will once again hold a Reconciliation Weekend. This will take place in all the parishes throughout the Diocese. Priests will make themselves more readily available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This will provide a special opportunity for the faithful to go to Confession before Easter and to experience God's mercy.

This Lenten initiative challenges us to take it seriously. The disciplines we practice at this time of year are meant to help us not only turn away from sin, but also to turn back to the Father. I pray that, like the Prodigal Son, you will discover through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the generous and unbounded love of God waiting for you this Easter.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

+ George W. Coleman
Bishop of Fall River