

BISHOP NOËL'S MESSAGE FOR LENT 2024

I'M IN TRAINING FOR EASTER

"I'm training for a marathon," says one. "I'm training for a singing competition," says another. Like the athlete who never stops training to stay in shape and maintain his stamina, like the pianist who gives himself time each day to practice his art, so the Christian lives Lent as training to "live with faith, hope and love, the passion and the cross, to reach the resurrection" (Pope Francis, February 17, 2023).

Lent is a time to deepen our relationship with Christ, and to follow in his footsteps with greater boldness and confidence. It's a time for the conversion of heart and reconciliation with the Lord, to be unified with ourselves, with others, with Mother Earth. It's a time of purification, to return to what's essential, to strip away the clutter, and to rekindle the fire of the Spirit in our lives still too marked by complacency and sin. It's a time of real effort to shake off the routine and stagnation in which our faith and spiritual life sometimes finds itself.

A "journey back to God", as Pope Francis so aptly writes, Lent invites us to set out on a journey, one that climbs and demands effort and sacrifice. Tiredness, discouragement and depression can cause us to fall into apathy, or slide into "I don't give a damn" or "what's the point?". We risk giving up the climb and ending the journey. Hence the importance of keeping our eyes fixed on the road, taking the means that Mother Church offers us for this time of conversion, namely prayer, listening to Jesus in his Word, receiving the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, fasting, and of course active and effective charity. To detach ourselves from mediocrity, superficiality and vanity, to overcome our resistance to following Jesus on the way of the Cross, we must let the Lord transform us by exposing ourselves, in prayer and adoration, to the power of His love. Our help comes from God, who calls us to discern where our lives are headed.

The journey back to God is only possible because God's journey to us took place in Jesus our Savior. No one can be reconciled to God by his or her own strength. Our strength is God. Our help comes from God, who calls us to discern where our lives are headed. It is also in God that we find the strength to come out of ourselves and touch, with our tears and our hands, the suffering of our brothers and sisters in need, struggling for clean water, healthcare, a roof over their heads, their daily bread, or hoping for peace, dignity and a welcoming land.

So, this Lent 2024, I'm making an extra effort to contribute to Share Lent and to support all those national and international organizations working to promote and bring about justice, peace and the fair distribution of the earth's goods, not forgetting the protection of our environment.

I'm not training alone. God is with me; the Church is with me: they are there to coach me. I'm joined by all those people of good will who are striving to build a just and fraternal world; I'm joined by all the brothers and sisters of my Christian community, all the baptized who are counting on me to support them and share with them this beautiful climb towards Easter in the joy, light and peace of the Risen Lord. Together, let's support each other as we follow Jesus, who wants us to be filled with His life and hope. Happy Lent!

† Noël Simard
Bishop of Valleyfield