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Lent 2024

*...We need our prayer to rise with greater insistence to the Father,
So that He may hear the voice of those who turn to Him
on the confidence of being answered... Pope Francis*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

On Sunday, January 21 of this year, Pope Francis inaugurated a Year of Prayer ahead of the 2025 Jubilee Year. The Holy Father is calling on the faithful “to pray more fervently to prepare ourselves to live properly this grace-filled event and to experience the power of hope in God.” This Year of Prayer, the Holy Father explained, is dedicated “to rediscovering the great value and absolute need for prayer, prayer in personal life, in the life of the Church, prayer in the world.”

In response to the Holy Father’s initiative, together with Bishop Barres, all the Bishops and I would like to encourage you, especially during this 2024 Season of Lent in particular, to focus on prayer. Traditionally, during this time all Christians are called to practice fasting, prayer, repentance, and almsgiving as a way of drawing us closer to God and reflecting on the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection in anticipation of the gift of new life at Easter. All pillars of Lent complement and support each other. Customarily, fasting is a way of disciplining ourselves and expressing our repentance for our sins. By abstaining from certain foods or activities, we show our love for God and our gratitude for His mercy. Fasting also helps us to empathize with those who are less fortunate and to share our resources with them. In fact, prayer binds all these Lenten practices all together, giving them an extra strength and direction. In days to come, as we prepare for the celebration of Easter, let us take this great opportunity to renew ourselves in the life of prayer, making it not just a duty or an obligation but also as a privilege and a joy.

Prayer is a gift from God, connecting us with Him and allowing us to experience His love in our lives. It is a ground for an authentic encounter which God uses to transform us and to make us more like Christ to one another. It is also a power that God grants us to overcome sin and evil and to advance His cause in the world, especially very much needed peace as we reflect these days on the situations in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Syria, Congo, and many other troubled places.

Personal Prayer. A classic description says that prayer is “the raising of our mind and heart to God.” We all might have our own experiences of prayer, and we can define prayer in our own and unique ways. However, most important is the fact that during sacred time of the year each of us should make the best effort to make a time for prayer, short or longer, in our daily lives. There are many ways in which we can engage with it during Lent. Many people might continue to follow a lectionary and other materials that provide Scripture readings and reflections for each day of Lent and be led by it to prayer. It is possible use prayer books, journals, apps, or online resources that offer different forms of prayer, such as meditation, contemplation, praise, worship, adoration, thanksgiving, and supplication. In some

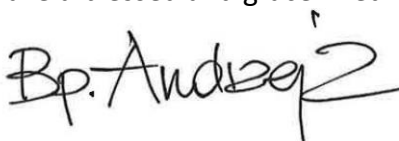
places there are groups of friends, or parishioners, who join prayer meetings, retreats, or online communities that share prayer requests and support each other in prayer. Most people create a prayer space in their home or workplace that helps them to focus on God. We should all look for an opportunity to pray without distractions and practice silence or solitude as a way of listening to God and being attentive to His presence. Whatever method or style of prayer we choose, the important thing is to pray with sincerity of heart, humility, honesty, and openness. During Lent, we should pray especially for the grace of conversion, so we can be inspired to experience the need of repentance and change and be led to encounter Jesus in the Sacrament of Penance. May we all grow in a deep desire to know the Lord more intimately and to love him more fully with the hunger for his grace and a thirst for his Spirit.

Communal Prayer. Time spent in prayer is never only personal. We all know that every individual action of one person has an impact on the whole community. Together in prayer, as we walk a synodal way, we grow in a deep sense of awareness that every act of love or time of common worship can profoundly strengthen and sanctify the whole Christian community and the whole human family. We are all connected in a special way as members of the Body of Christ, and we share the same mission and vision by celebrating of the Eucharist. This is the most profound and ultimate way of prayer. At each Mass we engage personally with the Paschal Mystery of the Lord and make it our own to be led by him, through the sacrifice of the cross to the glory of his Resurrection and our life in Him. The mystery of the Cross and the mystery of love Jesus shares with us can be understood in a deeper sense through prayer. Renewing our commitment to attend the Mass every Sunday would be the best step to renew ourselves in the life of prayer.

Prayers for the World. Both the celebration of the Eucharist and our personal daily prayer nourishes our faith, strengthens our hope, and increases our charity towards others. During Lent and beyond we are called to share our gifts and resources with the world around us, especially with those who are in need. We are to take care of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, and are to join them in their struggle for justice and dignity in the best way we can. Every good deed is always inspired and properly executed with the assistance of our continuing prayers, making us God's instruments of peace, justice, and mercy, which is so much needed in the world today.

Dear Friends, prayer is basically a conversation with God who is waiting for us. It doesn't have to be made up of loads of words as it is all about the conversion of heart. It's not just "saying prayers", it is more about living by them, letting our heart declare our love for God and others. Let this Lent be for all of us a sacred time of our spiritual renewal in prayer so we can all become who we are supposed to be in relationship with God and with each other. Our life prayer is a statement about who we are. The future of the world depends on our prayers and begins in us. Even though our prayers do not give any extra reverence to God, they certainly make us more revered before Him so we walk "humbly with the Lord."

Have a blessed and grace filled Lent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bp. Andrzej Zglejszewski". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop Andrzej Zglejszewski
Episcopal Vicar