Lenten Message

Each Lent Jesus calls us through the Church to come closer to him through our personal prayer and penance, and through our common Lenten practices.

This year, with the threat of war, prayer and penance are the more urgent. We read how those in the military now realize that so much is not under human control but truly in the hands of God, and thus are moved to pray with greater fervor. As each one of us discovers the reality of our dependence on God, our hunger for prayer becomes the greater.

Personal prayer is, so critically important, for many in a state of crisis. This is how Cardinal Albino Luciani, then Patriarch of Venice, described it before his election as Pope John Paul I. He observed that people, very often preoccupied with their jobs and material things, come to think little of the spiritual. Their hearts are touched and troubled by the confusion of our culture. He quoted the Spanish author, Donoso Cortes, "The world goes badly because there are more battles than prayers." He did recognize that communal liturgy brings great good, but he insisted, "They are not enough: we need a personal conversation with God."

This Lent we should look for ways each day to show our commitment to this kind of conversation, offered up especially for God's gift of peace. Daily Mass, reflection on the powerful Lenten scriptural readings, fasting, other penitential practices, and the Stations of the Cross can reinforce our connecting with the Lord. During this "Year of the Rosary," Pope John Paul II urges us to turn to a familiar form of prayer found immensely helpful by generations of believers.

Cardinal Luciani spoke of the great people who had their rosaries always at hand. And Pope John Paul II offers his own view about the Rosary in what he wrote nearly 25 years ago and reconfirmed in his recent letter:

"The Rosary is my favorite prayer. A marvelous prayer! Marvelous in its simplicity and its depth… It can be said that the Rosary is, in some sense, a prayer-commentary on the final chapter of the Vatican II Constitution Lumen Gentium, a chapter which discusses the wondrous presence of the Mother of God in the mystery

of Christ and the Church. Against the background of the words Ave Maria the principal events of the life of Jesus Christ pass before the eyes of the soul. They take shape in the complete series of the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries, and they put us in living communion with Jesus through – we might say – the heart of his Mother. At the same time our heart can embrace in the decades of the Rosary all the events that make up the lives of individuals, families, nations, the Church, and all mankind. Our personal concerns and those of our neighbour, especially those who are closest to us, who are dearest to us. Thus the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life."

Our Rosary this Lenten season is enriched by the new Mysteries of Light, with meditations on the gospel scenes that challenge our hearts: the Baptism of Christ, the Wedding Feast at Cana, the calls to conversion and to witness, the Transfiguration, and the Institution of the Eucharist. Each mystery calls us to a new and refreshing insight into the power and gifts offered with the coming among us of the only Son of God in the Incarnation. Most especially at this time we reflect on the peace that Jesus came to bring, a peace we pray for at every Mass: "Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: I leave you peace my peace I give you."

As 2003 progresses, we shall look for more opportunities to lift up the Rosary as the great prayer it is. And, as Lent continues, let us follow after Jesus with the prayer, penance and almsgiving that will open up our hearts for his purifying Holy Spirit, even as we seek his blessings of peace for our world, our nation, our families and our hearts.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Archbishop of Baltimore