



## **LENTEN DESERT INVITES US TO FACE THE TRUTH OF HUMAN SUFFERING TODAY**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace and well-being to you and your families in these winter months. As you know, we are entering the desert of Lent. This is a sacred and holy time for us as we follow the example of Jesus when he retreated to the desert for 40 days of prayer and fasting in preparation for his mission to save the world from evil. We are called during Lent to take an honest look at ourselves, our relationship with God and our relationship with our brothers and sisters. In this spiritual desert there are less distractions, we can see things as they really are, including some painful truths that we might not want to face. Indeed, there is much pain and suffering in our world today. It is almost overwhelming to see it in our media, whether we are watching it on television, reading about it or seeing it in our social media feed. What's our reaction to all the suffering around us? Do we respond with solidarity and prayer, or with indifference?

This Lent I invite you to pray with all your strength and sincerity for those who are suffering. Pray for the unborn who are lost to the tragedy of abortion, and the mothers and fathers who must endure the pain of that decision in the aftermath. While there have been positive developments in the courts in recent years that make abortion less accessible, it remains a terrible scourge that claims millions of innocent lives each year. Let us, please, continue to pray also for our unhoused brothers and sisters who we see in increasing numbers on our streets. As we imitate Jesus' fasting in the desert as part of our Lenten observance may the hunger that we feel place us in solidarity with all those who do not have enough to eat. Finally, let us pray for an end to the violation of human dignity that is occurring right now in the treatment of our immigrant brothers and sisters at the hands of federal immigration authorities. While we as a Church do not condone unlawful entry into the country, the brutal way authorities are enforcing the law is unacceptable and does not recognize immigrants as human beings, much less as the children of God that they are.

Lent is a time when we humble ourselves before God, acknowledging our sinfulness and our moral behavior, to ultimately grow closer to Him and one another. Please know of my prayers for you on this journey of reconciliation and solidarity. Let us keep our brothers and sisters who suffer close to our hearts in a special way these 40 days. As we are all part of the body of Christ, St. Paul teaches us "if one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it." (1 Cor. 12:26). With the help of the Holy Spirit, may this time of spiritual renewal help us to become more human, more compassionate and better Catholic Christians.

Bishop Alberto Rojas