

Bishop Peter J. Jugis delivered the following homily during Mass on Ash Wednesday 2004 at St. Patrick Cathedral:

“Every year our Lord Jesus Christ invites us into this Holy season of Lent precisely because he wants to work a miracle in our hearts and it is the miracle of repentance and conversion in our heart through his grace and it is truly a miracle isn't it? When God's grace can move the human heart to repentance, when God's grace can move the human heart to conversion to a more faithful following of Christ it is a very personal dialogue that Christ initiates between himself and us, each one of us personally where he speaks tenderly to our hearts but insistently turn away to sin and return to me with all your heart.

In a few moments Ashes will be placed on our head as a sign of penance an outward sign of penance which was already use in the Old Testament times, the sacred Scriptures bear witness to the ashes that were use many times as a sign of repentance of the people for their sins and the church has preserved this custom of ashes even onto the present day. What they do is express our desire for Christ to undertake this interior journey of conversion in us. Of course the conversion of heart that we begin today and continue to the season of lent is design to lead us to the celebration of the sacrament of penance before Easter.

The Lord tell us that we must change and become like little children to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven and that is a conversion process, if we are talking about conversion today, is a conversion he asks of all of us, all the time, to became like the little children. Change, cultivate simplicity and trust in imitation of Christ who himself identified with the little ones.

Our Holy Father has asked us to reflect on the condition of children during this season of Lent and he has asked us to be mindful of them because as he says welcoming children is a way of welcoming Christ. For Jesus himself says, “Whoever receives one such child in my name, receives me” what greater source of grace could we ask for during Lent than receiving Christ himself.

There are children, too many unfortunately, who have been profoundly hurt by the violence and the misconduct of adults and sadly this has even happened to some children in the church. You know that this Friday the United States Catholic Bishops are releasing the report on all the allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct with minors that have occurred in Dioceses' of America since 1950. This report was created to help us Bishops determined whether the steps we have already taking to addressed the issue have worked or if additional steps are still needed. The Bishops are committed to eradicating the sexual abuse of minors from the church, hopefully what the American Bishops are doing will also serve as a model for the larger community to follow in eradicating sexual abuse of minors from our society.

I express my profound sorrow, heartfelt sorrow, to those be they present in our Diocese or throughout the country who have been victims of this crime, and it is crime, some clergy did not live up to their calling to be an image of Christ the Good Shepherd. And this has had a profound effect on our entire church community. St. Paul wrote that “when one member of the body suffers all the member suffer with it” and we are all suffering with those who have been victims of this immoral behavior.

I would like to ask you during your Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and sacrifice, alms giving and works of charity, to keep this intention foremost in your heart, for God's Grace to bring healing to our brothers and sisters who are victims of this misconduct and abuse that has occurred in our church and for God's grace to bring healing to the church. This certainly is the intention of my heart today as we begin the journey of conversion and repentance, the season of grace which is Lent and I hope that you will follow my lead and keep that intention also upper most during your journey of spiritual renewal this season.

The Holy Father and his Lenten message has asked us to reflect on the condition of children today, he asked us to turn with childlike simplicity to God this season, to call on him as our Father as Jesus taught us because when we remember that we are children, that we are children of our heavenly Father and that we are brothers and sisters to each other, it is easier for us to open our hearts to the little ones including those who as children have been hurt by others, "whoever receives one such child in my name receives me."

During the season of Lent let us with childlike simplicity as children of our heavenly Father and brothers and sisters to one another receive each other and welcome each other as Christ bids us to."