



Ash Wednesday, March 6, 2019

“Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

(2 Cor.6:2)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we begin our annual observance of Lent, this penitential season that calls us to prepare our hearts, individually and collectively, to celebrate the central mystery of our faith - Jesus' resurrection from the dead and our share in His victory over sin and death - we are all very keenly aware that *this* Lent is very much needed for all of us. As St. Paul tells us in the Second Reading for Ash Wednesday, *“Behold, now is a very acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.”*

As members of the Body of Christ, we are painfully aware that this past year has been an unusually difficult time of great suffering, pain, and anguish, as well as embarrassment over the discovery of sin and misuse of authority by some in leadership within the Church related to child sexual abuse. These revelations have been the cause of divisions within the Body, and, in some cases, have led to a breach of trust in those who are called to shepherd the flock of Jesus entrusted to their care. We pray that these tragic discoveries will lead to even greater vigilance in purging this evil from the Church at every level. We continue to keep our prayers for forgiveness and healing focused on all those who, directly or indirectly, have been victimized or affected by this evil as faithful members of the Church.

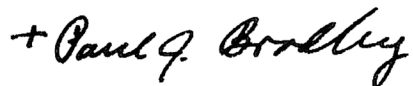
With this in mind, and as we begin this year's Lenten Season, this *“acceptable time”*, I ask that we all to enter into these 40 days as a time of “Healing and Spiritual Renewal”. Even as we offer our prayers, sacrifices, and fasting for our own personal need to grow in holiness, may we also offer our special prayers in reparation for the sins of those whose actions or neglect have been so hurtful to individuals and to the entire Body of Christ. In doing so, it is important to keep in mind the full breadth of the need for forgiveness and conversion as we live out our daily lives, and to pray for an end to so many other evils that plague advancement in holiness, and stunt our efforts to carry out the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy to which the Lord calls each of us. While many people might object to doing penance for the sins of others, rightfully discerning that they were not personally guilty of those sins, we also realize

that, as members of the Body of Christ, when one of our members sins, we all feel the pain; and when one member repents and turns from sin, we all share in the joy (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26). Praying for reparation means that we are working directly toward healing and unifying the Body of Christ as Christ intended.

Whatever our particular Lenten resolutions may be during this very holy Season of Lent, we must pray together that each of us will grow in holiness and become more like the saint we are created to be with the help of God's grace. Let us also pray, that through our acts of penitential reparation, our pilgrim Church on earth will move forward to a time of spiritual renewal, as we keep our eyes fixed always on the source of our hope and our trust: the Risen Jesus, who has destroyed the power of sin and death forever.

Assuring you of my daily prayers for you and our entire Diocesan Family of Faith, and asking for your prayers for our beloved Body of Christ, I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul J. Bradley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo