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2023 LENTEN PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (GCBC)

Theme:

Lent: A Grace-Filled Time to Seek Peace and Reconciliation with God and Neighbour

1.0 Greetings

1.1 Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, as we prepare to start this year's *Lenten Season*, we, your Bishops, bring you fraternal greetings of peace and blessing. We wish to invite you, our dear brother Priests, Consecrated Men and Women, and Lay Faithful, and indeed, all Christians and men and women of good will resident in our country, Ghana, to join us during this special season of grace to work towards peace and reconciliation with God and neighbour.

2.0 Lenten Season: A Grace-Filled Time of God's Mercy and Favour

2.1 On Ash Wednesday, which falls tomorrow, we will join Catholics and other Christians all over the world to begin the Season of Lent, a 40-day pilgrimage of faith to God. When we gather in God's presence at the beginning of Lent on that day, we will do so to express our need of God's mercy and forgiveness by participating in a corporate act of penance and reconciliation, beseeching God for the grace to use this favourable time to prepare for the celebration of Easter.

2.2 Traditionally, we mark the Lenten Season with religious acts of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We also undertake other Lenten pious exercises such as weekly Stations of the Cross, daily praying of the Holy Rosary, pilgrimages to various Marian Shrines and Prayer Sanctuaries for recollections and retreats. We believe that by undertaking these spiritual acts of penance with sincere hearts and contrite spirits, the Lord our God who sees all that is done in secret will look with serene countenance on us and grant us His mercies and unmerited favour (cf. *Matt. 6: 3-4, 6, 17*). In the light of this belief, we wish to call on all citizens of Ghana in general, and our Catholic faithful in particular, to intensify their life of prayer, fasting, and good works and also avail themselves for the sacrament of penance and reconciliation in this season of Lent.

3.0 Lenten Season: A Special Season of Instruction

3.1 St. Jerome says that: “*Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ*”. This means that a Christian who does not read the Scriptures and live according to its teachings does not know Christ, for no Christian can worship God faithfully without a deep reverence and love of God’s Word.

3.2 When we read and or listen to God’s Word attentively and meditatively, we see and experience God in our midst and we meet God in His fullness as He speaks to us. In God’s Word, we come to know and understand God’s plan and purposes for our lives, we come to sense His ways and His love and to acknowledge His holiness. In reading the Word of God, we find guidance and direction as well as peace, joy, fulfilment, and hope (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

3.3 Since Lenten Season is a special season of instruction, the readings for the season have been chosen carefully to help our faith to grow. Consequently, we wish to exhort all our Catholic faithful to endeavour to spend more quality time in this grace-filled season to reading their Bibles, other spiritual books and to listen attentively to the instructions on the faith in the various celebrations of the Season.

4.0 Lenten Season: Resisting Evil and Sinful Inclinations

4.1 Lenten spirituality is combative, a struggle against evil and sinful inclinations. In this season, we need to carry out the combat against evil and sinful inclinations every day. Some of these challenges we need to nip in the bud, among others include: bribery, corruption, greed, armed robbery, destruction of the environment, murders, violence and intimidation. Using the weapons of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we must face the struggle to overcome these evil and sinful inclinations in our lives each day, particularly, in this holy Season so as to dwell in the mercy of God.

4.2 This grace-filled season invites us not only to be content with ridding ourselves of grave or mortal sins, but also every venial sin. In this spiritual endeavour, we exhort all to strive to be committed to prayer, fasting and almsgiving as well as the practice of corporal and spiritual works of mercy proposed by the Church, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, bearing wrongs patiently, comforting the sorrowful and admonishing sinners during this season of grace.

5.0 Prayer for End to Conflicts, the Beginning of Reconciliation and Peace

5.1 The ongoing conflicts in Bawku and other parts of the country as well as the raging Russia-Ukraine war continue to fill our hearts with much sorrow and grief.

As we continue to pray for God's definitive intervention in these conflict situations, we call on all Catholics and other Christians as well as our Muslim brothers and sisters and indeed all people of faith and good will to join us to continue to offer prayers and petitions to God within this special Season and beyond for an end to these conflicts and wars. We must intensify our prayers for an end to these wars and conflict situations in the hope that with God all things are possible. Prayer is our greatest weapon; for what is impossible, prayer makes possible.

5.2 In the same light, we urge prayers for all the victims of the Turkey-Syria disaster, for God's repose for those who have lost their lives, especially, our compatriot Christian Atsu. We pray for consolation for the grieving families and God's abundant blessings for those involved in the rescue efforts.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 In conclusion, we believe, as Christians, that Jesus Christ is our peace and reconciliation and that He has broken down the walls of discrimination and division among people, and more so, He has reconciled humanity with God our Creator and us with each other (cf. *Eph. 2:14-16; 2 Cor. 5:19-21*).

6.2 Our country, at this material moment, needs her sons and daughters to live in peace and harmony in their families, in their marriages and homes, in their localities, in their places of work, in their clans and ethnic groups, peace and harmony among members of different political parties and in the nation as a whole. We believe that it is time to change our hearts and seek peace and reconciliation with God, neighbour and the world around us. Our prayer is that we will all endeavour to use this year's Season of Lent to seek peace and reconciliation with God and our neighbours.

6.3 May God bless our homeland Ghana and make our nation great and strong. May God grant us His peace and a grace-filled Lenten Season!



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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2023