

Bishop's Pastoral Letter  
Ash Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016

## LENT: WHEN LOVE GOES DEEPER

It has been just over a month into 2016 and we have gotten off to a busy start with the solar and lunar years so close to each other. In God's grace, I found time to pause and give thanks for a momentous 2015 in terms of our diocesan life as God's people.

I thanked the Lord for the Jubilee Day of Prayer in Singapore on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2015 when 51,000 Christians gathered as one body in Christ in the National Sports Hub to lift up the nation to God. The Year of Jubilee for Singapore indeed became the year of the Lord's favour for many of our parishes and deaneries. The Diocese was immensely blessed financially and responded to this blessing by cancelling the building-related loans of some of our deaneries and parishes that totalled about S\$ 2 Million. This sparked a ripple of joyful praise and glorious freedom in God across the Diocese.

I also thanked God for significant growth and movement in different parts of our Diocese. God's work in Nepal has been truly outstanding. Over the last year, since the double earthquake, the number of people worshipping the Lord in the Deanery of Nepal has grown from 9,000 to about 12,000 through baptisms and confirmations. A wonderful experience of amazing Kingdom advance! We learn yet again that 'hunger for God' and 'desperation' are the vital antecedents for Revival.

That brings me to my invitation to one and all to ***make this season of Lent a time of intentional prayer and fasting***. "Lent" has already begun with Ash Wednesday falling on the third day of the Lunar New Year on 10<sup>th</sup> February this year. It will last for 40 days (not including Sundays) and lead up to the celebration of Jesus Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday. It is a reflective period when we 're-live' the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Cross dominates our thoughts and our emotions, leading us to deep contrition, deep awareness of God's grace, deep surrender and deep desire for God and His glory.

How can you and I enter the spirit of Lent and emerge stronger pilgrims and disciples of the Lord? Allow me to suggest ***a 3-pronged approach***:

**Abstinence:** What will you give up, that is costly to you, in order to devote yourself to communion with God through prayer and Scripture-reading (Lk 10: 38-42)? Think of the areas of food, entertainment, consumption, sleep and even late night emails! One practice that some have found helpful is to wake up half an

hour before your normal waking time each day to spend unhurried devotional time with the Lord. Others have used their office lunch time to take a prayer-walk or find a quiet place of prayer. Interestingly, several who have started such practices during Lent have made them a permanent pattern by the power of the Spirit of God.

**Participation:** How can you positively participate in the kingdom of God and thereby grow as a child and servant of God? Will you devote some time weekly to help someone in need? Is there some action you can take to alleviate the oppressiveness that others experience (Is 58:1-12)? Will you give yourself to the study of God's word through a Christian Education Course? Will you allow God to move you to use savings in consumption as a free-will offering to Him? Will you, for love of Christ, take steps of reconciliation towards an offending person?

**Intercession:** How can you step up in interceding for others, for your church and the advance of Christ's kingdom in the world? There is amazing power through prayer for all of us to discover. Lent is a time of falling face-down in God's presence to seek His face, that the glory of His presence and the wonder of His salvation in Christ may be revealed to a dark and hope-bereft world. Like Daniel, there is a vital need to plead the promise of God to bring revival (Dan 9:2-6, 17-19).

I began Lent this year by drawing aside for unhurried prayer and the reading of Mark's Gospel Chapters 14 & 15. Trusting in the Lord's grace and relying on the Spirit's power, my prayer for all of us is that our set-aside time of quiet meditation on Jesus going to the Cross will kindle the fire of our love for Him! As the hymn writer has expressed it:

*"All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood...*

*Love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all."*

Inspired by the river of life in Ezekiel 47, let Holy Spirit-enabled revival begin from his Lordship in the sanctuary of our hearts – a Lordship we embrace with a renewed and deeper love for Him. Then, let this renewed love for Christ flow through us (His church) to bring life to the nations. All this will be to the praise and glory of our great God and Saviour!

Have a truly blessed and transforming Lent!

In Christ's enduring love,

**+Rennis**