

# Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



## ‘Lent and Love’

“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Roman Missal). This poignant phrase from the fourth Eucharistic Prayer refers to the Lord Jesus at the Last Supper on the night before he died for us. It reminds us that he loved us, even unto death, death on a cross. It well captures the essence of Lent: Lent is all about love!

So imagine my surprise when someone recently asked me a rather unique question: “Bishop, will you dispense the diocese and give us all permission to eat meat on Ash Wednesday, so we can celebrate Valentine’s Day?” The person was asking because this year the beginning of Lent, Ash Wednesday, falls on February 14th. My response, of course, was an immediate “No,” because Ash Wednesday is one of only two days in the year (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday) when the Church asks all Catholics not only to abstain from meat but also to fast. Why would we prefer to honor a secular holiday instead of honoring the Lord as we begin

our Lenten journey?! I suggested instead that anyone who wanted to celebrate “Valentine’s Day” could do so the evening before Ash Wednesday, known as Fat Tuesday, Mardi Gras or Carnivale, and eat whatever and however much they wanted!

But then the very fact that I was asked this question got me to thinking: we’re asked to fast and abstain only out of love, love for the Lord who loved us to the end. Every year as Lent approaches, faithful Catholics consider what it is they will give up, what they will do extra, how they will observe Lent and prepare for the celebration of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

We do so to discipline our bodies and our wills, to repent of our sins and beg for the grace to overcome temptation, and to become ever more faithful disciples who strive to live as the Lord would have us live.

This year I invite you, whatever Lenten practice or penitential act you are inspired to undertake,

to do it out of love, to do it with love and to do it for love! As you pray, fast and give alms, do it all with the intention of love: with gratitude that the Lord loved us to the end, and with the goal that we may love Him and others as he has loved us. As we prepare to begin Lent, I encourage all the members of the Diocese of Toledo to “use” your fasting, prayer and almsgiving for the sake of love, so that at the end of Lent 2018, we might more fervently love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.

This year, Ash Wednesday falls on February 14th, Valentine’s Day, but we will observe it as a day of fast and abstinence, out of love for the one who loved us to the end (Jn 13:1), Jesus Christ. Because Lent is all about Love!

*+ Daniel E. Thomas*

Most Rev. Daniel E. Thomas  
Bishop of Toledo  
January 31, 2018

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