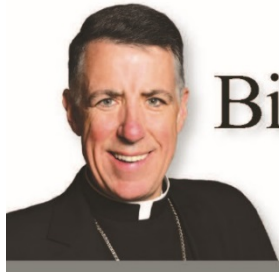


NOTE: This letter was published in the Feb. 8, 2018 edition of *The Catholic Spirit*, the official newspaper of the Diocese of Metuchen.



Bishop James Checchio

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On February 14, we enter the holy season of Lent while we also celebrate Valentine's Day throughout our country. I remember as a child exchanging Valentine's Day cards with all the girls in our class, while we boys received them from all the girls. Later, of course, it was an important day to have a date to go to the movies, dinner, roller

skating or such. Today, husbands and wives and those in love still exchange cards or gifts, particularly flowers and chocolates, and often have dinner out.

Ash Wednesday is not a time for happy celebrations. Chocolates and flowers do not fit in well with the somber mood of the day. So how are we to celebrate Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day this year on the same day? It would be good to postpone dinner and save those chocolates for another day or give them on Mardi Gras the day before. But, we should all keep in mind that both days give us an opportunity to express our love. Valentine's Day is always associated with love. Ash Wednesday and Lent are times that call us to love of God and others, as we turn to the Lord anew with all our hearts, minds and strength.

At the St. John Neumann Pastoral Center, I am so pleased that we will begin a new adventure in love February 14. On that day, we will begin offering daily Eucharistic Adoration in our chapel. Last year, we began daily Mass, and now we will extend the blessings the Lord offers us in the Eucharist through Adoration. The work of the Pastoral Center is to promote evangelization, which has to be rooted in prayer!

At each Mass, we climb Calvary anew to enter into the Lord's sacrifice for us. It was His greatest moment of love, a love that lasts until our day, and will endure forever. It is a great mystery for us to enter in to, and it is the love which feeds and sustains us in the other loves of our lives, even those of Valentine's Day.

At baptism, we each took on three lifelong disciplines, that of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These disciplines help us to return to or stay committed to our baptismal promises. Regularly communicating intensely with our Beloved, exercising self-control so as to emphasize the supreme importance of the spiritual over the material in our lives, and finally generously sharing with those in need. These disciplines are the marks of our Lent. Just as we are marked by ashes on Ash Wednesday, which call us to penance, a reminder of our sinfulness and the power of God to create holy people out of sinners, so these three disciplines should also be marked more clearly within us today.

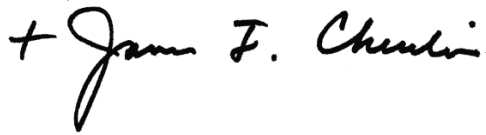
As part of your efforts to spend more time in prayer this Lent, I encourage you to consider coming to the Pastoral Center for Eucharistic Adoration and Mass. On Ash Wednesday, I will celebrate Mass in the chapel at 9 a.m. Immediately afterwards, our Eucharistic Adoration will begin, ending

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at 11:45 a.m. On all other days the Pastoral Center is open, Adoration will be held in the chapel from 9 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. followed by Mass.

For our almsgiving and fasting, perhaps consider participating in our Rice Bowl initiative, which combats hunger locally and around the globe (www.crsricebowl.org). Thanks to your efforts, our diocese has been a leader in our country with this worthy effort. Our Bishop's Annual Appeal, which takes place during Lent, is another way to help those in need and support so many good pastoral initiatives and charitable efforts in our diocese. Your parish will be sharing information on our appeal with you and you can also learn more about it on our website: www.diometuchen.org. Whatever you choose to do for Lent will no doubt help to unite us in loving God and neighbor more fully.

Indeed, may this Lent be a time of turning anew to the Lord for you, may it be a time of deepening your love. Know of my prayers and love for you, and I count on your prayers too, especially during this holy season of Lent. God bless you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Checchio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend James F. Checchio, JCD, MBA
Bishop of Metuchen