



FEBRUARY REFLECTION

TO: THE DIOCESE OF STOCKTON

FROM: BISHOP MYRON J. COTTA

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My Dear People of God,

The month of February holds a special place in the hearts of many with the annual celebration of St. Valentine's Day. Everywhere we look, with the help of the advertising world, we see the ever-popular symbol of St. Valentine's Day - the *heart*.

Universally, the heart is recognized as a common symbol for love; not just romantic love, but more profoundly, it can also serve as a symbol of God's love for us and our love for him. God, who *is* Love, has created us in his image to love, know and serve him. His unconditional love has a tendency to change, to transform hearts.

In Holy Scripture, we see God's willingness to initiate this *change* of heart as in the Book of Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts" (Ez. 36:25-26). When this conversion of heart occurs, our worldview is transformed. The Holy Spirit awakens within us a sensitivity to sin. The Spirit initiates a movement away from self and directs one's attention, and concern, toward the other. The result: a profound *movement of the heart*, and with it, a *desire* to serve.

To serve, to care for the other, while turning away from sin, brings to mind another special day in the month of February - the 17th - Ash Wednesday. It is a day that offers the opportunity for us to examine our hearts and consciences. During the 40 days of Lent, our attention will be drawn to the three pillars of spiritual discipline: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The third pillar, *almsgiving* - can be summed up as the selfless act of giving and offering service to the other.

Through the penitential act of almsgiving, we are challenged to *empty ourselves* by giving of our time, talent and treasure. We, as the faith community, must be concerned about the common good - looking out for the well-being of the other. This concern for the common good moves us out of a mode of *maintenance to that of mission!* We need to arrive at a better understanding of the purpose of the Church. We must never forget that the Church of Christ exists for the sole purpose of *missio* - mission. But what is the mission? It is evangelization!

Lent is a time to humble ourselves by turning away from sin and accepting the Gospel of Jesus. By accepting and living the Gospel, in our everyday lives, we become evangelized by the good news of his passion, death and resurrection. This good news has the capacity to transform our lives. It will empower us to combat the evils of our day and age as we fulfill our call as *missionary disciples*.

This Lent, let us not be selfish, nor fearful, to give of our time, talent and treasure for the sake of our brothers and sisters in need. For if we truly profess Jesus as Lord of our lives, this must include every aspect of our lives, even our *time*, our *talent* and that of our *treasure*.



As today's evangelizers, young and old, let us do our part to address and transform society through the *power of good*. May our hearts be moved to participate in the mission of Jesus: to serve as he served.

May the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus grant our hearts the courage and desire to serve our brothers and sisters during the Lenten season. Let us never forget - this *movement of the heart* will only happen if we allow God's grace and mercy to flow from his heart to ours!

In the Peace of Christ,

Bishop Myron J. Cotta