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Lent 2023

...go to your inner room..."

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Each year, the Church in her wisdom proclaims the Gospel of Matthew on Ash Wednesday. At the very beginning of Lent, the Church wants us to reflect on the interior disposition that should accompany us during this sacred time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

In particular, in verse six of chapter six, Matthew records Jesus' exhortation, "But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret." I propose that this one phrase can present a great challenge and a great gift to us this Lenten Season.

On one hand, to go apart from the noise and hurry of our lives and be in quiet sounds so inviting. On the other hand, to be immersed in silence with just God can seem frightening. What will I say? What will He say? Will I hear anything? What if I don't like what I hear? What if I don't know what to do with all this quiet?

Despite this trepidation, I encourage us to truly enter our "inner room." Spiritually, our inner room is an interior place in our heart that is the deepest part of our being where we speak intimately with God. This is a far different place than the frenetic world of twenty-four-hour talk, endless blogs, social media postings, tell-all books, and immediate opinion with harsh judgment. Rather, our inner room is a place of peace, tranquility, and being in the presence of God.

As we rediscover the peace of being with God in silence, we also can practice a Lent which prompts us to be more sparing in our speech as well. We can resolve to be charitable in our words, circumspect in making judgments, and humble in offering opinions. The Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist will orient us toward this goal as well as Lenten prayer, fasting, and good works.

May this Lent be a time when we quiet our hearts, reflect on God's Word in Sacred Scripture, and "pray to (our) Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." God bless you and all your efforts to grow closer to Him in this quiet Season of Lent.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

✠ Most Reverend Alfred A. Schlert
Bishop of Allentown