

Bishop's Lenten Message 2021

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Now that the Lenten season is once again upon us, some of you might be thinking (especially during this pandemic), "Do we really need to give up something for Lent after this past year?"

With COVID, we have already given up so many things in life and in the Church. No more hugs or handshakes. No more fellowships or fundraisers. Sitting in our bubbles with no singing of our favorite hymns.

For others, things were not so much "given up" as they were "taken away" by COVID. Loss of jobs. Precious time with loved ones. And, tragically, the loss of life. Everyone has been affected by this pandemic. Some, more than they can handle.

It seems that the previous Lent never really ended with all the self-denial we have been practicing or forced upon us since last March.

But here we are, and it is Lent again. So what's changed?

Well, we have changed.

The experiences of this past year living in a pandemic have taught us not to take things for granted. Living in what seems like a perpetual Lent means that when we come out on the other side of this pandemic, it will be like a great stone being rolled away from a sealed tomb of restrictions and regulations. It will be a resurrection of sorts for us when a new way of living will emerge out of all the lockdown of COVID-19.

Some of you may have read the famous sermon, "It's Friday. But Sunday's Coming!" by the African-American Baptist Pastor S.M. Lockridge (1913-2000). This powerful sermon emphasizes how the world lost all hope on that first Good Friday when Jesus died on the Cross. However, as Christians, we know the end of the story. It's Friday. But Sunday's coming!

Sunday's coming! Death, defeat, despair do not have the final word. It may be Friday for us right now in these COVID times, but Sunday's coming!

To quote sections of Pastor Lockridge's sermon:

“It’s Friday. See Jesus walking to Calvary.
His blood dripping. His body stumbling. And his spirit’s burdened.
But you see, it’s only Friday.
Sunday’s comin’.

“It’s Friday. The world’s winning. People are sinning. And evil’s grinning.

“It’s Friday. The earth trembles. The sky grows dark. My King yields his spirit.

“It’s Friday.
Hope is lost. Death has won. Sin has conquered, and Satan’s just a laughin’.

“It’s Friday. Jesus is buried. A soldier stands guard. And a rock is rolled into place. But
it’s Friday. It is only Friday.

“Sunday is a comin’!”

Indeed it will. I have no doubt about it.

After Lent, there will be Easter. After COVID, there will be a resurrected Church.

Like the Risen Christ, we will still bear the wounds of this pandemic, but we will be a
New Creation called to share the Good News in new and creative ways. We will see
God’s world differently. We will have a new vision of being God’s Church which knows
the pain of loss but also the hope of glory.

But for now, this is Lent. We will continue the tradition of keeping it holy by
self-examination, penitence, prayer, fasting and almsgiving and by reading and
meditating on the word of God. It’s Friday now.

But Sunday’s coming!