

Refugees and peace need our prayers, charity and sacrifice this Lent - Archbishop Eamon Martin

As we approach the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we remember that this agreement was not an end in itself, but the beginning of a new way of living our relationships on this shared island.

Tomorrow, Ash Wednesday, is the beginning of the holy season of Lent when, each day, Christians offer prayer, charity and sacrifice. The beginning of Lent traditionally involves fasting, and the distribution of ashes on the foreheads of church-goers. Many make Lenten promises or resolutions throughout the forty day penitential period leading up to Holy Week and Easter Sunday, when we mark the Crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Ahead of Lent 2023 Archbishop Eamon Martin said, “Over the last year people around the world have experienced death and suffering on a large scale caused by wars and natural disasters. The effects of climate change continue to impact our most vulnerable sisters and brothers. Now, more than ever, the three pillars of Lent – prayer, charity and sacrifice – are needed for our own spiritual conversion and to support those in need.

“At this time, when homes throughout the country receive their annual Lenten Trócaire box, I encourage families to pray together in a special way, and to fast, for world peace, and for the alleviation of the suffering of refugees who are living amongst us. I also invite everyone to follow our daily #LivingLent digital media initiative to grow closer to God during Lent.

“Our hearts and prayers continue go out to the suffering people of Ukraine. During Lent let our acts of prayer, charity and fasting, each day, be dedicated to the plight of refugees, and for a global peaceful environment. We must always work for peace, pray for peace and make sacrifices for peace. All of us have the capacity to build peace by our words, our actions and our attitudes to others.

“As we approach the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we remember that this agreement was not an end in itself, but the beginning of a new way of living our relationships on this shared island. We must continue the unfinished work of peace and reconciliation. With our words, particularly on social media, we choose to sow peace or conflict, love or hate, to build up, or to tear down, to heal or to hurt, to forgive or to resent, to soothe or to inflame. During Lent we should place a guard over our social media use and learn that as Christians working together on this island we should build bridges in a spirit of collaboration for the greater good.”

Notes to Editors

- See the 2023 Lenten message of Pope Francis here: [Lent 2023: Lenten Penance and the Synodal Journey | Francis \(vatican.va\)](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francis/messages/ Lenten_messages/2023/20230203_messa-2023-02-03_en.html)
- Archbishop Eamon Martin is Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland.
- Watch: [interview with Archbishop Eamon Martin on the Unfinished Work of Peace](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) ahead of the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement here (audio for media available on request).
- The #LivingLent initiative offers short daily suggestions on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These include prayer and Scripture reading suggestions; opportunities for penance and fasting in our daily lives, such as to refrain from gossip; fast from negativity online; give up certain foods; availing of the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Confession; suggestions for charitable acts like donating to Trócaire and other charities; and donating your time by helping your own family, school, parish. Hashtag #LivingLent can be used and shared to help put themes of prayer, fasting and charity into practice during this Lenten season.

- **The liturgical season of Lent**

Ash Wednesday is a day of fast and abstinence for Christians. For the believer Lent is the time of preparation for Easter and it commemorates the forty days which, according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus spent fasting in the desert before beginning His public ministry where He endured temptation. In Lent – through prayer, penance (including participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Confession), acts of charity and self-denial – we are called to renewal of our Christian life in preparation for Easter:

Prayer

The Stations of the Cross, a devotional commemoration of Christ's carrying the Cross and of His execution, are often observed. As well as giving something up it is becoming more common to take something up as well and this may include taking time to volunteer, or spending more time in prayer.

Fasting and Penance

Penance is an essential part of the lives of all Christ's faithful. It arises from the Lord's call to conversion and repentance. Christians undertake penance: in memory of the Passion and death of Jesus; as a sharing in Christ's suffering; as an expression of inner conversion; as a form of reparation for sin.

Charity

Traditionally during Lent many of the faithful commit to fasting or giving up certain types of luxuries as a form of penitence, the money saved from this can be donated to charity, for example, contributing to their Trócaire box.