



A few years ago, I was asked by a parishioner, “Why do Catholics put ashes on their heads and afflict themselves with fasting? What good does this do? It seems morbid to me; I don’t need that.” I ask you, how would you answer our questioning friend? We might begin by asking: why did Jesus fast and subject himself to suffering in the desert? Certainly, he didn’t need that . . . or did he? In this week’s Gospel (Mk 1:12–15), we are reminded that Jesus embraced forty days of fasting and discomfort in the desert at the prompting of the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.” In the Second Reading (1 Peter 3:18-22), St. Peter tells us why: “Beloved, Christ suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God.” The fact is, Jesus was compelled to suffer not for himself, but for us!

St Thomas Aquinas wrote, “**Jesus went to the desert as to a field of battle.**” He was battling for our salvation (and won the victory!) precisely by embracing a 40 day fast, enduring the cruelty of life in an untamed desert and subjecting himself to the full-scale temptations of Satan.

Okay, we understand why Jesus fasted, but why must WE fast and perform other sacrificial acts? The two primary reasons are: 1) the example of Christ, and 2) the teaching of Christ. St. Peter writes, “For to this you have been called, because **Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps**” (1 Peter 2:21, NAB). Voluntary, sacrificial, self-denial is an essential part of any authentic Christian spirituality. Jesus told us we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him or we cannot be his disciples! Along with Jesus’ example, we also have his teaching:

When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And **your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.** (Matthew 6:16–18, NAB)

So it is with good reason the Church provides us the opportunity to be united with Jesus on the spiritual battlefield armed with the weapons of self-denial. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “**By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert**” (#540). In the opening prayer for the Mass of Ash Wednesday we pray, “**Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint.**” In light of these things, we understand why Pope Paul VI wrote:

It is strongly desired that bishops and all pastors of souls, in addition to the more frequent use of the sacrament of penance, promote with zeal, particularly during the Lenten season, extraordinary practices of penitence aimed at **expiation** and **impetration**. (Pope Paul VI, *On Fasting and Abstinence*).

Given the moral decay and hardship sweeping our culture like a plague, we might answer our questioning friend: Not only do we do well to put ashes on our heads and, by fasting, unite ourselves to Jesus in battle against spiritual evils, but under the circumstances, how can we afford not to? We neglect these things to our peril!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples

Jubilee Year 3 **“Behold, I make all things new.”** ~ Rev 24:5
Renewing and strengthening our faith for the future.



Most Rev. Thomas Jerome Welsh D.D, J.C.D. 1st Bishop of Arlington Diocese

1974-1983

Thomas Welsh was born December 20, 1921, in Weatherly Pennsylvania. He was one of 5 children born into an Irish Catholic family. In 1937, he attended St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Overbrook, Pennsylvania.

May 30, 1946, Welsh was [ordained](#) a priest in the [Archdiocese of Philadelphia](#). He continued studies in Washington D.C. at Catholic University of America. He earned a doctorate in canon law, civil law, J.C.D. (Juris Canonici Doctor, Juris Civilis Doctor). He also held an advanced degree in divinity, D.D. Doctor Divinitatis ("Doctor of Divinity").

In the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Welsh served as parish priest, high school teacher, Tribunal judge and seminary rector. On April 2, 1970, Welsh was ordained Auxiliary Bishop of the Philadelphia Diocese.

When Pope Pius VI erected the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia in 1974, he appointed the Most Rev. Welsh to be the first bishop of the Arlington Diocese. Welsh was installed on August 13, 1974.

Fr. Avella, the first priest to be ordained by Bishop Welsh, said, "You can really see God's hand in sending him to found the diocese because the foundation of anything is so important." Welsh encouraged religious orders into the Arlington Diocese including Poor Clares. He established 6 parishes and 11 new churches.

After the Vietnam War, over 2,000 South Vietnamese refugees relocated to Northern Virginia. Bishop Welsh set up the Office of Migration and Refugees Services in 1975 to help minister to their needs. In 1979, he opened the Holy Martyrs of Vietnam Catholic Church in Arlington.

Welsh began the diocesan newspaper the *Arlington Catholic Herald*. The first issue came out in January 1976. In 1977, Welsh approved Christendom College, founded by Warren Carroll Ph.D.. Welsh purchased the building that is now home to Paul VI Catholic High School in Fairfax. He formed the Brent Society to mobilize lay men and women of the Arlington Diocese to evangelize and promote opportunity for Catholics to live out their Faith publicly. The society was named for the Brent Family who were the first prominent Catholic settlers in Virginia. In response to the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling, Bishop Welsh established the Family Life Bureau in 1977. The Family Life Office organizes diocesan pro-life activities including March for Life.

In 1983, Welsh founded the Catholic Home Study Institute (now Catholic Distance University).

After serving the Arlington Diocese for 8 years, Bishop Welsh was sent back to Pennsylvania. In 1983, Pope John Paul II appointed him to be the second bishop of the Diocese of Allentown. Bishop Welsh died February 19, 2009 at age 87.

Year 3 we focus on sharing our Catholic Faith with others in word and deed through evangelization and mercy. For more on preparation, visit: www.arlingtondiocese.org/goldenjubiliecelebration/ - Office of Religious Education