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**A PASTORAL MESSAGE FROM ARCHBISHOP NELSON J. PÉREZ
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SEASON OF LENT**

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent—a season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These 40 days call us to seek a full conversion of heart that leads us to the richness of God’s mercy through the triumphant promise of the Resurrection at Easter.

In his 2020 Lenten Message Pope Francis reminds us that, “The experience of mercy is only possible in a ‘face to face’ relationship with the crucified and risen Lord ‘who loved me and gave himself for me’ (*Gal 2:20*).” The Holy Father goes on to say, “Prayer can take any number of different forms, but what truly matters in God’s eyes is that it penetrates deep within us and chips away at our hardness of heart, in order to convert us ever more fully to God and to his will.”

As we are marked today with the sign of the cross on our foreheads today, let us commit ourselves to live out what they symbolize. May we keep our eyes fixed on the outstretched arms of Christ crucified and Christ the merciful. Let us seek to encounter others with charity and understanding. In doing so, we will find the face of the Lord in those around us. Together, we will build a culture of Christian love by acting as Jesus did—with courage and compassion that respects the dignity of each person as a precious child of God.

May our Lenten journey this year be a fruitful one filled with grace, renewed hearts, and fidelity to the message of the Gospel as we seek the light and hope of the Resurrection. May God bless you abundantly.

+Nelson J. Pérez
Archbishop of Philadelphia