

## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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## DIOCESE OF GRAND FALLS

First Sunday of Lent – 2017

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

*Romans 6:5*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

St. Paul, in the sixth Chapter of his letter to the Christians in Rome, teaches us that the Death and Resurrection of Jesus can have a powerful transforming effect in our lives.

St. Paul teaches that we will be united with Jesus in a resurrection like his if we are united with him in a death like his. Who among us does not want to have a share in Jesus' Resurrection? Is there any one of us who does not want to be able to live now, knowing that eternal joy and happiness await us upon our death? Or, is there anyone of us who does not want to be raised up out of the inevitable hardships and struggles that accompany daily life, so as to experience peace during troubled times, love that can overcome personal conflict, clarity in the midst of doubt, and hope during times of despair? This is the promise that being united with Jesus in a resurrection like his holds out to us – a promise meant to be fulfilled today, every day, and into eternal life.

The promise of sharing in Jesus' resurrection is only one side of St. Paul's teaching. St. Paul, in all his writings, insists that the Cross cannot, and should not, be avoided on the path to the Resurrection. He says: "If we have been united with Jesus in a death like his, **then** we will be united in a resurrection like his." The Holy Season of Lent is an opportune time to 'unite ourselves with Jesus in a death like his.' What does it mean then to unite ourselves with Jesus in a death like his?

In Chapter six of his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul further teaches us that our first – and greatest – experience of union with Jesus in his death comes at the moment of our Baptism. In the early days of the Church when baptizing adults was the norm, the ceremony of Baptism was a very vivid celebration. Near the entrance way of the Church there was a pool-like baptismal font filled with more than a meter deep of water. The candidate was led into the water by a priest who, placing his hand on the shoulder of the candidate, plunged him/her under the water while proclaiming, "I baptize you in the name of the Father". To further highlight the significance of this immersion, the candidate was held under the water for several seconds. This ritual was repeated two more times, using the words "in the name of the Son" and "in the name of the Holy Spirit", thus completing the

Trinitarian formula. With each immersion the candidate was held under the water longer and longer until finally being released out of the water in which they thought they might die by drowning. In the early Church, in the waters of the Baptismal Font, candidates were united sacramentally with Jesus in his death and resurrection. So too is it for us today. Though most of us were baptized as infants and, while we cannot remember our baptism or how we felt when the water was poured on us, the effect is the same – through our baptism, each one of us is united with Jesus in his death and resurrection. However, the desire to be “united with Jesus in a death like his” cannot be limited to the moment of our Baptism.

Today, and each day of our lives, “uniting ourselves with Jesus in a death like his” is a choice we must make. It is helpful to remember that Jesus chose his death out of love for us, out of obedience to his Father, and to bring about the Reign of God in a broken world. In the same way, “uniting ourselves in a death like his” means making choices that show genuine love for others and are consistent with the commands of our Father, thus making our world a better place.

Jesus Christ himself, our Lord and Saviour, offers us three suggestions for choosing loving actions rooted in Christian values: Fasting, Charity and Prayer. Within each of these three Lenten Disciplines, the choices we make will be truly Christ-like only if they are chosen out of love for others, reflect the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel and add to the building up of the Reign of God. Lent can be a time for families – big or small – and for individuals to reflect deliberately about how to “unite ourselves with Jesus in a death like his”, confident that we will also be united with Jesus in his resurrection.

With the assurance of my prayers for a grace-filled Lent, I remain

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Anthony Daniels". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend R. Anthony Daniels  
Bishop of Grand Falls