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**Most Rev, Bp Peter Houhou**

#### Dear Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ of the four (4) corners of our beloved Diocese of Gizo, Western, Choiseul and Isabel Provinces, Solomon Islands.

Before we enter into the 3rd month of our journey for this Year 2024, as Bishop Shepherding our Diocese, firstly, I want to acknowledge all your contributions, big or small, in whatever form of service you are rendering to the People of God in our Families, Communities, Schools, Clinics, Hospital, Constituencies, parishes and in all work of life.

As we continue to focus and reflect on the "SEASON OF LENT", as Christian, Lenten Season is a very important time for our Spiritual wellbeing. It is important because, it is a time for each one of us to reflect on our own life journey and see what areas in my life that needs conversion? What material things, habits and attitudes in my life that I need to let go?

The Christian meaning of Lent revolves around Preparation, Reflection, and Penance. During Lent, Christian often engage in practices such as Fasting, Prayer and Almsgiving as a way to deepen their connection with God and to reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Fasting during Lent typically involves abstaining from certain foods or luxuries as form of self-discipline and solidarity with the suffering of Christ.

During Lent, believers throughout the Universal Church, in particular in our Diocese of Gizo we should engage on practices such as fasting, prayer and repentance as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Easter.

The primary purpose of Lent is to deepen our connection with our God, reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, as mention above and seek repentance from sin. It is not

about shame but rather an awareness that sin separates us from God, and Lent provides an opportunity for cleansing and freedom from sin and shame.

Symbolically, the forty days as from the 14th of February to the 30th of March, remind us of Jesus spending forty days in the desert praying and fasting. By observing prayerfully, the days of Season of Lent, each individual Christian imitates Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for forty days and at the same time contemplating his suffering, death and resurrection. During this season of Lent each one of us should also be journeying with Jesus in the desert, praying, fasting and have a time to do little penance.

Why trace ashes on our foreheads? While tracing the sign of the Cross with ashes on the forehead, priest or the deacon says; "REMEMBER YOU ARE DUST, AND FROM DUST YOU SHALL RETURNED". Ashes are a symbol of penance made sacramental by the blessing of the Church, and they help us develop a spirit of humility and sacrifice.

Looking back in history, Ashes were used in ancient times as a symbol of mourning. In our culture as Melanesian, dusting of oneself with ashes was an expression of mourning and sorrow when someone in the family died. But as Christian, it is an expression of sorrow for one's sins and faults. The Liturgical practice of applying ashes on one's forehead during Lenten Season goes back as far as the eight century.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, as we are journeying together this Lenten Season, do not fear to go into the desert, a beautiful place to mold, shape and to form your life to celebrate with great joy the Resurrection of Christ our Savior. There is no short cut to reach the beautiful life that is waiting for you with our Risen Lord. Always put the Cross of Christ traced on your forehead with ashes on Ash Wednesday as your spiritual compass to guide your journey now until the day you will meet your Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

ALELUIA., ALELUIA, ALELUIA.

HAPPY EASTER TO YOU ALL.

YOUR SERVANT BISHOP PETER HOUHOU

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## POPE FRANCIS LENTEN MESSAGE 2024



**CNA** Catholic News Agency

### Pope Francis' 2024 Lenten message: 'Lent is a season of conversion, a time of freedom'

Pope Francis has centered his Lenten message for 2024 on the Book of Exodus, choosing "Through the Desert God Leads Us to Freedom" as its main theme to encourage the faithful that the season is a journey from bondage to spiritual renewal and freedom.

The pope framed this reflection on the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, a story that not only represents the journey from bondage to emancipation but also of revelation and spiritual freedom. "When our God reveals himself, his message is always one of freedom," the pope said.

The Holy Father went on to note that this process "is a demanding one" and that "it is not answered straight away. It has to mature as part of a journey."

"We realize how true this is at those moments when we feel hopeless, wandering through life like a desert and lacking a promised land as our destination. Lent is the season of grace in which the desert can become once more — in the words of the prophet Hosea — the place of our first love," the pope observed.

Pope Francis also underscored the centrality of the desert in the New Testament, observing that on the first Sunday of Lent, we are reminded that Jesus "was driven into the desert by the Spirit in order to be tempted in freedom."

"The desert is the place where our freedom can mature in a personal decision not to fall back into slavery. In Lent, we find new criteria of justice and a community with which we can press forward on a road not yet taken," the pope added.

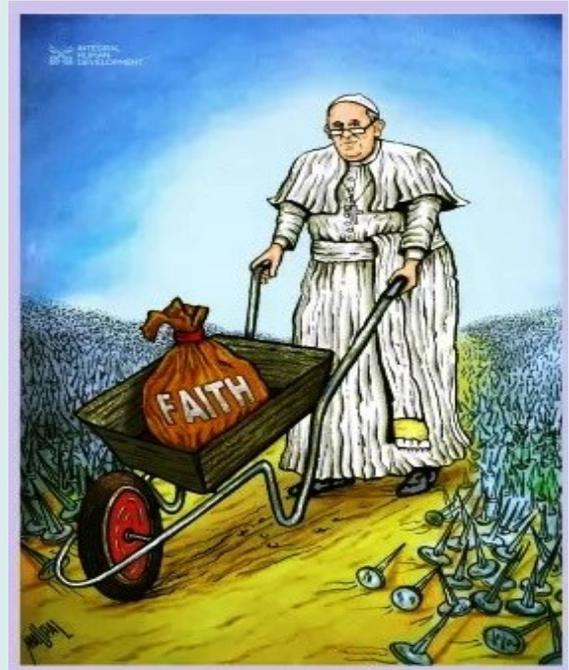
Tying the season of Lent to the setting of the desert, the pope noted that the penitential season cannot be looked at just as an "abstract journey" but must, instead, be "concrete," and this shift is predicated upon our capacity to "open our eyes to reality."

For the pope, this reality is centered on the quest to mitigate the suffering and various forms of social and economic oppression that are ubiquitous today, much of which, he said, is caused by "a deficit of hope."

"This 'deficit of hope' is not unlike the nostalgia for slavery that paralyzed Israel in the desert and prevented it from moving forward. An exodus can be interrupted: How else can we explain the fact that humanity has arrived at the threshold of universal fraternity and at levels of scientific, technical, cultural, and juridical development capable of guaranteeing dignity to all, yet gropes about in the darkness of inequality and conflict?"

During Lent 2024, the pope has encouraged the faithful to undertake an interior examination by asking: "Do we hear that cry? Does it trouble us? Does it move us?"

"Our Lenten journey will be concrete if, by listening once more to those two questions, we realize that even today



we remain under the rule of Pharaoh. A rule that makes us weary and indifferent. A model of growth that divides and robs us of a future."

"All too many things keep us apart from each other, denying the fraternity that, from the beginning, binds us to one another," the pope continued.

The Lenten season, according to the pope, is a time that is characterized by personal struggle as we suffer from myriad temptations, but it is the recognition of this that calls us to "pause in prayer, in order to receive the word of God, to pause like the Samaritan in the presence of a wounded brother or sister."

Highlighting the three pillars of Lent — prayer, almsgiving, and fasting — the pope noted that they are not disparate acts but form a symbiotic "movement of openness and self-emptying in which we cast out the idols that weigh us down, the attachments that imprison us." The pope closed his Lenten message by highlighting the communal aspect of the season, noting "the contemplative dimension of life that Lent helps us to rediscover will release new energies."

"In the presence of God, we become brothers and sisters, more sensitive to one another: in place of threats and enemies, we discover companions and fellow travelers," he added.

In line with this communal aspect, the pontiff related it to the Church's "synodal form," which the Church is "rediscovering and cultivating."

"I invite every Christian community to do just this: to offer its members moments set aside to rethink their lifestyles, times to examine their presence in society, and the contribution they make to its betterment."

**SOLOMON ISLANDS ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS**

**SIARC UPDATE FEBRUARY 2024**

**Sister Teresa Tebaia OP— SIARC President.**



The Executive of SIARC in the Diocese of Gizo is very grateful to update a few important matters about

SIARC and upcoming events for 2024.

**About SIARC**

SIARC stands for “Solomon Islands Association for Religious Congregations.”

Special thanks to Bishop Luciano Capelli sdb who encouraged all Religious to form this association way back in 2018. Thanks too, to the executive that established a pioneer committee to turn the dream into reality and the practical steps set up to continue until now.

Catholic Diocese of Gizo is blessed with the presence of five different Religious Congregations ministering in six parishes, spreading the Gospel flame alive and active through five individual charisms, exercising their strengths on many different levels.

The five Congregations ministering in the diocese are:

Salesian Sisters – ministering among the people in Gizo Parish.

Servants of the Visitation – ministering among the people in Nusabaruka and nearby villages (Gizo Parish)

The Dominican Family. – ministering among the people in Wagina, Gizo, Moli, Sirovanga and Nila parishes.

Servants of the Lord Sisters and Incarnation Priests - ministering among the people in Wagina.

Servants of Charity - ministering among the people in Noro Parish.

**Opening of SIARC.**

In 1997 Pope John Paul II declared that the feast of the Presentation on 2nd February would be dedicated to all who live a consecrated life. It is marked each year as a day of prayer. SIARC celebrates this day as its feast day and marks the opening of the program for the year.

This year 2024, we are again so grateful that we were able to celebrate together. Religious in Gizo and Noro parishes came too to celebrate the mass and we shared a meal together. The highlight of the day was renewal of vows during the mass.

Fr Anil shared a powerful message based on the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Joseph and Mary presented Jesus as a sacrifice, pure sacrifice to the Lord. Fr Anil challenged the Religious men and women and all present during the mass about how we present ourselves every day in our prayer, ministry towards ourselves, God and others. Are we truly present with our whole selves in what we are doing or half half nomoa? Thanks to Fr Anil for the won-



derful message, very suitable message, to reflect on and make it come alive in our ministry in the new year.

Wagina Sisters and Priests were also able to celebrate on the same day, and renewed their vows during mass.

The next day, 3rd February, the SIARC Committee had their first meeting to make plans and take practical steps for the 2024 program.

SIARC plans to have a meeting with other Religious men during the priests’ meeting to finalize the mission outreach to other parishes.

It was decided that there will be a dinner for all the priests after the Charism Mass on a Thursday in March. The Bishop will be asked to deliver an important message during dinner time. The president of SIARC will also be asked to give an update of upcoming events. Indoor games will be organized by Religious Orders to make the night enjoyable for the priests and all who will take part.

Let us to pray for each other and encourage each other and our communities to practice the synodal way of collaboration, participation and mission.

Best wishes for many blessings in 2024!



**ST. PETER & ST. EUSEBIUS PARISH NEWS IN BITS**

**SPUTC Opening Mass 2024.**



Saint Peter Urban Training Center and the St. Peter Kindergarten Gizo had their opening Thanksgiving Mass for their academic year 2024 on Monday 12th February.



Attended by mentors and parents, especially mothers who observe their children participating in the larger songs that enliven the liturgy.

Highlighted was Bishop Peter Houhou's homily on difficulties and challenges. He asserted that these challenges present chances for us to succeed. Additionally, he stressed to them the value of maintaining a positive mindset as they proceed through their academic year 2024.

At the conclusion of the Mass celebration, a group photo was taken.



**Saint Eusebius Youth Showcase Publicly.**

As part of their ongoing activities for this year, St. Eusebius Catholic Youth Noro presented a portion of their charitable work to the general public.

Beginning in the month February 2024 with Fr. Charles; they moved around Munda to visit their good friends the disabled with donations from the Bank the South Pacific (BSP).

Their purpose is to provide support so that eve-



ryone has better opportunities to live, care for others, and feel a part of a world that is inclusive.

Also on the 16th of February the youths initiated the program for every Friday to pick up rubbish from the Main Parish to the Noro market.

They were welcomed by the Town Council for the initiation.

**A Visit to Promote Music, SPUTC.**



Saint Peter Urban Training Center here in Gizo had the privilege of having Jeremy Donovan perform at the school



compound on Wednesday 21st February 2024.

Accompanying him were staff from the Australian High Commission in Honiara and the Western Provincial Government representatives

who were warmly welcomed by Bishop Peter Houhou, other diocesan staff, and the school staff.

Australian First Nation musician Jeremy traveled with the intention of promoting the music, artwork, history, and culture of his fellow Australian First Nations people.

During an hour of performance, he genuinely displayed some of his abilities with Native Australian music.



**NORTHERN DEANERY NEWS IN BISTS**

**PTA Moli Holds First Meeting.**



On Wednesday, February 7th, the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) of St. Joseph Moli Primary School held its inaugural meeting.

Anthony, a volunteer for the parish media, reported from Moli and stated

that their meeting was predicated on reviewing their financial report for 2023 as well as the entirety of the school's development plan for this year and their projected budgets, etc.

A one-day meeting was presided over by the chairman and the headmaster.



Fr. Thomas lists their responsibilities as managing the clinic for the upcoming year, helping to establish the community secondary school, and constructing the new parish church building.

So, starting off with Bangara Rural Health Center has given a positive sign for these youths, said Fr. Thomas.

**PALM SUNDAY**  
24th of March



Palm Sunday is the Christian moveable feast that falls on the Sunday before Easter. The feast commemorates Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, an event mentioned in each of the four canonical Gospels.



**Voruvoru take Initiative to Clean Bangara RHC.**



Voruvoru youths took the initiative to clean up the Bangara Rural Health Clinic on the 3rd of February as part of their program said Fr. Thomas Pata who is currently serving the parish.

Although the number of young people in the parish had decreased, many are enrolled in secondary education, and others have left, but their involvement in its programs and communities inspired them.

**PASCHAL TRIDUUMP**  
28th to 30th March



The Paschal Triduum or Easter Triduum is the period of three days that begins with the liturgy on the evening of Maundy Thursday, reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday.

HEALTH TIPS & NEXT EVENTS

From previous article (verywellmind.com)

Coping With Stress and Blood Sugar

Stress can be stressful! And when your blood sugar is affected, this can only exacerbate the stress. Here's the thing, though: both stress and blood sugar can be managed by making some simple lifestyle changes and by reaching out for support when needed.

Lifestyle Changes

Here are some lifestyle changes you can make that will both lower stress and blood sugar:



Exercise Improves Sleep



- Make it a point to get enough sleep every night
  - Stay hydrated
  - Eat regular meals that are focused on whole foods rather than processed foods
  - Take some time each day to relax your mind
- Try [mindfulness and meditation](#)
- Refrain from smoking and drinking alcohol
  - Exercise daily
  - Take mental health days off when you can

Learn to say no to obligations when you feel overwhelmed

Support Groups

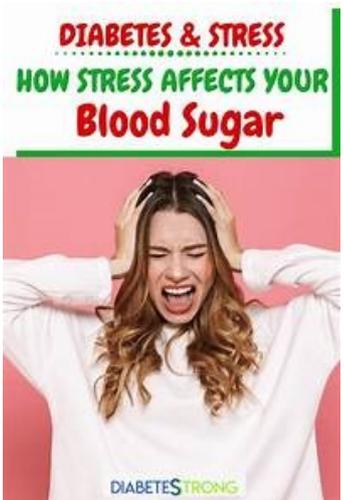
If you've been newly diagnosed with diabetes, support is vital. Use this link from the Defeat Diabetes Foundation to find a diabetes support group in your state.

Summary

Stress releases cortisol, which can change the way your body produces and uses insulin. This can cause changes in your blood sugar levels, which may be particularly serious for someone who has diabetes. Thankfully, reducing stress can effectively address this problem and can help keep your blood sugar levels in check.

A Word From Very-well

Discovering that your blood sugar fluctuates in response to stress can be distressing in and of itself. Please remember that this is common, and there are simple and effective ways to address it. Most importantly, you should be in touch with your healthcare provider if you notice changes in your blood sugar readings. If you are finding your stress levels difficult to manage, please reach out to a therapist or counselor.



To be continue next issue

- UPCOMMING EVENTS FOR APRIL 2024 -



DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY  
Sunday 7th of April

Jesus told Saint Faustina that He desired an annual solemn Feast of Mercy. This Solemnity of Divine Mercy was established as a universal celebration on the Eighth day of the Octave of Easter. On that day the floodgates of Mercy are opened and many souls are made holy. Plan on making this solemn feast a day of great celebration this year 2024.

The Annunciation of the Lord  
Monday 8th of April

The Annunciation of the Lord is usually celebrated on March 25, but in 2024 it falls on Monday of Holy Week, so it is transferred to Monday of the Second Week of Easter, which is April 8, 2024. According to the Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, the Annunciation is transferred to the next available day when it is impeded by another Feast or celebration

