

Pastoral Letter **2020-01**

My Dear People of God in the Diocese of Novaliches:

In the gospel passage for Ash Wednesday (cf. Mt 6:1-6.16-18), Jesus gives instructions to his disciples on prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These three “traditional Lenten practices” help us to live out properly our relationships with God, with our neighbor, and with ourselves. In observing them, we become less concerned with ourselves, and become more focused on God and our neighbor.

Now, almsgiving is actually a “divine action,” and not just a human act, because the first to “give alms” – that is to say, *to show mercy* – is God himself: “The Lord, the Lord, a God, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity” (Ex 34:6). And as God’s children, we are called to resemble the Father in his mercy and his compassion.

Pope Francis reminds us, too, that almsgiving is “a gesture of love that is directed at those we meet ... a gesture of sincere attention to those who approach us and ask for our help.” (General Audience, Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, 9 April 2016). In other words, we look at our brother or sister, and we pay attention so that we will understand what he or she truly needs.

At present, the Philippines has the highest stunting situation in the ASEAN region (cf. Global Hunger Index, 2019). Because of hunger and undernourishment, especially in the first one thousand days, more than three out of ten Filipino children are stunting in physical and mental growth. Considering this dire situation, it is urgent that the Church continue its mission of feeding the hungry.

Pondo ng Pinoy’s Hapag-Asa Integrated Nutrition program is committed to feed the hungry and malnourished children throughout the country, as well as the undernourished pregnant and lactating mothers. For the *Pondo ng Pinoy* member-dioceses, we hope to feed at least thirty thousand children, and to organize their mothers into self-help groups in order to sustain the gains of the feeding.

The FAST2FEED Fund Campaign is being re-launched today to raise funds for the food subsidy to participating dioceses. What you save from fasting you may donate to *Hapag-Asa*: it will be used to feed the hungry and malnourished children, one meal a day for 120 days. All it takes is Php 10.00 a day or Php 1,200.00 for six months to nourish a child to good health and to a better future.

Once again, we appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, to support *Hapag-Asa*. Let us continue to keep wide open “the door of mercy of our hearts” and traverse “the path of charity ... with fidelity and joy” (cf. *Misericordia et misera* 16). Through *Hapag-Asa*, let us continue the work of mercy. Let us be more generous in our almsgiving this season of Lent.

May God bless you and reward you for your kindness and generosity.

Most Rev. Roberto O. Gaa, DD
Bishop of Novaliches