

# Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang

## Proposal for Lent 2013

*"The Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone..."*

Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, January 2010

### 1. SUMMARY

For many years now, during the season of Lent, the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang has incorporated environmental themes into the prayers and practices of the faithful. For example, some weekly themes identify the garbage around us with the garbage of sins in our hearts.

This year, as the Church invites us once again to prepare our hearts through acts of penance, prayer, and corporal works of mercy, perhaps it would also be a good idea to be more mindful of the garbage we generate through our everyday actions and actually reduce our trash output by *fasting from plastic*. Thus, for the coming 40 days of Lent, let us try to abstain from purchasing or using items that come packaged in disposable plastic, as our way of reducing our own harmful impact on creation.

### 2. RATIONALE

Fasting from food and abstaining from meat, from other things that give us pleasure, or from our bad habits, bring much spiritual benefits if we offer our sacrifices to God. We enter into our own desert experience with Jesus.

If we try to abstain from disposable plastic during this Lent, we can also reach our own deserts. We will have to think about the things we buy and why we buy them, to examine our consumer values and clarify what is important to us. Usually, we throw away disposable plastics without much concern or thought. But as it leaves our sight, it does not really go *away*; it just becomes someone else's problem.

Thus, our abstinence from disposable plastics helps other people and the rest of creation. As we reduce the amount of garbage in our homes and communities, we reduce its harmful effects on nature and act in solidarity with creation.

### 3. WHAT IS WRONG WITH DISPOSABLE PLASTICS?

The main concern about plastic is that it is not biodegradable. Plastics are normally made of materials extracted from crude oil, the same type of oil that is used to make fuel for cars and motorcycles. The most common type of plastic bag is made of *polyethylene*, a new substance made by humans that microorganisms do not recognize as food. Since no existing bacteria can break down plastic, it cannot biodegrade like other organic materials.

What happens to plastics is that it *photodegrades*. When plastics are exposed to the sun's ultraviolet radiation for a long time, the *polyethylene* material becomes brittle and begins to crack, breaking into many tiny pieces. This process is estimated to take between 500 and 1000 years, but even when the plastics break into smaller fragments it remains non-biodegradable and toxic for the animals and humans that eat them.

Plastics clog waterways and can cause floods in cities. Eventually, they make their way to the sea. In fact, plastics are the most pervasive form of ocean litter. There they pose a serious danger to birds and marine animals that often mistake them for food. Thousands of animals die every year from swallowing or choking on plastic items.



***So why do we continue to use disposable plastic bags to carry our things for only a few minutes, but which will then become a problem for creatures and the Earth for hundreds of years?? It does not make sense.***

#### **4. WHAT CAN WE DO FOR THIS LENTEN SEASON?**

- As you buy things from a store, try not to accept the plastic bag that they will usually use to put the items that you bought. Instead, put the purchased item in your own bag.
- Refrain from purchasing or drinking water from disposable plastic bottles. Recycling consumes energy and just because they can be recycled does not mean that they are actually recycled. Use your own re-useable water bottle.
- Abstain from the use of plastic straws, polystyrene lunch boxes, and other food items that come in disposable wrappers, such as noodles and candies. These items cannot be recycled and are either thrown away or burned, both of which are not good to do.
- If you do have to buy plastic, make sure that it is recyclable, and that you dispose of it in a way that will assure that it will be recycled.
- Of course, exceptions are made for medicines and other important items that offer no alternatives.
- Take good care of the things you already have so that they last longer and are not easily destroyed and thrown away.