

- Does anyone feel like...they've already been living Lent...for an entire year?
 - So we may be tempted...
 - just to give up...
 - and go pass out somewhere...
 - because...we're already exhausted...
 - even before we start!
- But perhaps we should look at it this way...
 - Looking at the world around us...
 - is it in better shape...than it was last year...
 - or is it worse?
 - Are people more loving?
 - more merciful...more patient?
 - And what about us?
- This is not the time to give up...
 - because this world...
 - the people around us...
 - even ourselves...
 - we've still got a long way to go.
- And the only thing that will get us there...is Jesus Christ.
 - Even if we're ready to give up...
 - on ourselves...on our world...
 - He is so very far...from being ready to give up on us.
 - In fact...
 - Jesus wants to give us all the grace we need...
 - not just to convert our own hearts this Lent...
 - but to re-convert...the world around us.
 - He wants to pour out extraordinary graces...
 - to match this extraordinary moment in time...
 - with so many people...
 - society as a whole...
 - walking away from Him.
- In fact...
 - the darker...things get...in the world around us...
 - the greater the grace...the Lord is going to offer...
 - because He wants His light...to shine through us...all the more.
 - And that's true...
 - whether we are talking about our own struggles in life...
 - or society as a whole.
 - As St Paul said:
 - *"where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more."* (Rom 5:20)
 - So the darker it gets...the worse...things seem to be...
 - the greater...the reason...for hope.
- Again...Christ wants to pour out extraordinary graces...
 - to match this extraordinary moment in time.

- He wants to raise up saints in our midst...
 - People who've had...
 - such profound and life changing encounters with Him...
 - that their hearts are set on fire...
 - with a burning passion...
 - to share that love with others.
 - And lest we start to wonder...
 - who those saints might be...
 - my brothers and sisters...
 - we are all called to be among them.
 - Jesus is choosing you!
- It's so very important to remember...
 - that Jesus started it all...
 - with 12 unqualified disciples...
 - What did they know...
 - about converting themselves...
 - much less the entire world?
 - What did they know about the priesthood?
 - about how to run the church?
 - about how to miraculously heal bodies and souls...
 - much less to raise the dead?
 - Absolutely nothing!
 - And yet they accomplished it all....
 - because it all started...
 - with a profound and life changing encounter with Jesus Christ and His love
 - He provided the grace from there...step by step.
- And He wants the same for us....
 - He wants us...
 - to have a profound and life changing encounter...with His love.
 - That's actually the purpose of Lent...
 - to ready ourselves...for that kind of an encounter.
 - That's actually the purpose...
 - of our prayer and penance and good works...
 - to help us overcome bad habits in our life...
 - and to form new ones...
 - things that will draw us closer to Him.
 - But at the same time...
 - we do have to be careful...
 - with what we choose to do this year...
 - because we are so tired...
 - so we need to be prudent...
 - But we also need to trust...
 - that Christ will provide us with the grace and strength we need...
 - to accomplish His will.

- So what I would suggest is pooling our efforts...
 - there can be a common strength...
 - that comes from joining in the same effort...
 - and encouraging one another along the way.
 - And Archbishop...is actually providing the means.
 - He's suggesting that we do three things in common this year..
 - and offering them for the common intention...
 - of a spiritual renewal for our Archdiocese...
 - that more people can have...
 - that life changing encounter with the Lord...
 - starting with ourselves.
 - So Archbishop is suggesting that we:
 - 1. Spend time reading the Gospels.
 - What better way is there...to get to know Christ?
 - 2. Another is joining together in prayer...
 - specifically the daily rosary...
 - beginning today...
 - through the Feast of Divine Mercy - the Sunday after Easter.
 - 3. And lastly by forming our consciences...
 - by asking ourselves whose voice we follow when making decisions...
 - what kind of things are having an influence on us?
 - He fleshes it all out...
 - in a beautiful document that he has written...to the entire diocese...
 - along with the vision...that the Lord is giving him...for our future.
 - I encourage you all to read it. It's inspirational!
- So the ideal...is to do these things in common...
 - for a common strength...and for a common intention.
- So for school teachers or parents:
 - This might mean...giving a short Gospel passage...to pray with overnight.
 - Ask the children to reflect on it...
 - What's happening in the scene...who is present...can you picture yourself in the scene? What's Jesus doing and saying to you?
 - And then follow up the next day with sharing.
 - Or it might mean leading a decade of the rosary...
 - before each class period...
 - or before each new activity at home...
 - like before homework...before dinner...before going to bed.
 - Before you know it...you've prayed an entire rosary!
- But by joining in this common effort...
 - for the common cause...
 - of more people having...
 - a profound and life changing encounter with the Lord...
 - we will be helping to change this world...
 - one heart at a time...one Hail Mary at a time...starting with our own.

- We're going to move into the distribution of Ashes now...
 - back when I was a seminarian in Rome...
 - I learned that we are one of the few countries...
 - that imposes ashes on the forehead in the form of a Cross.
 - When we walked into the classroom...
 - with 300 students...from all over the world...
 - we got a lot of stares!
 - So today...because of pandemic...
 - we are going to distribute ashes...
 - like most of the rest of the world...
 - by sprinkling them on top of your head.
 - In fact...
 - if you see pictures of the Holy Father in the news today...
 - that's how he receives and gives them.
- I promise we won't use a ton...
 - because we don't have all that much!
 - (for those watching online in our school...your teachers are doing it for you)
 - but as always...
 - we'll do it with the words:
 - *Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*