

THE PASTOR'S CORNER

TIME FOR RENEWING FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

Excerpts from Pope Francis's Message for Lent 2021

In this Lenten season, *accepting and living the truth revealed in Christ* means, first of all, opening our hearts to God's word, which the Church passes on from generation to generation. This truth is not an abstract concept reserved for a chosen intelligent few. Instead, it is a message that all of us can receive and understand thanks to the wisdom of a heart open to the grandeur of God, who loves us even before we are aware of it. Christ himself is this truth.

~ *Fasting, experienced as a form of self-denial*, helps those who undertake it in simplicity of heart to rediscover God's gift and to recognize that, created in his image and likeness, we find our fulfillment in him. In embracing the experience of poverty, those who fast make themselves poor with the poor and accumulate the treasure of a love both received and shared. In this way, fasting helps us to love God and our neighbor, inasmuch as love, as Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches, is a movement outwards that focuses our attention on others and considers them as one with ourselves (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 93).

~ *Lent is a time for believing*, for welcoming God into our lives and allowing him to "make his dwelling" among us (cf. *Jn* 14:23). Fasting involves being freed from all that weighs us down – like consumerism or an excess of information, whether true or false – in order to open the doors of our hearts to the One who comes to us, poor in all things, yet "full of grace and truth" (*Jn* 1:14): the Son of God our Saviour.

~ *In these times of trouble*, when everything seems fragile and uncertain, it may appear challenging to speak of hope. Yet Lent is precisely the season of hope, when we turn back to God who patiently continues to care for his creation which we have often mistreated (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 32-33; 43-44). St. Paul urges us to place our hope in reconciliation: "Be reconciled to God" (*2 Cor* 5:20). By receiving forgiveness in the sacrament that lies at the heart of our process of conversion, we in turn can spread forgiveness to others. Having received forgiveness ourselves, we can offer it through our willingness to enter into attentive dialogue with others and to give

comfort to those experiencing sorrow and pain. God's forgiveness, offered also through our words and actions, enables us to experience an Easter of fraternity.

~ In Lent, may we be increasingly concerned with "speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 223). In order to give hope to others, it is sometimes enough simply to be kind, to be "willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference" (ibid., 224). To experience Lent in hope entails.... "prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls [us] to account for the hope that is in [us]" (*1 Pet* 3:15). Love rejoices in seeing others grow. Hence it suffers when others are anguished, lonely, sick, homeless, despised or in need. Love is a leap of the heart; it brings us out of ourselves and creates bonds of sharing and communion.

~ *Love is a gift* that gives meaning to our lives. It enables us to view those in need as members of our own family, as friends, brothers or sisters. A small amount, if given with love, never ends, but becomes a source of life and happiness. (cf. *1 Kings* 17:7-16; *Mk* 6:30-44). Such is the case too with our almsgiving, whether small or large, when offered with joy and simplicity.

~ *To experience Lent with love* means caring for those who suffer or feel abandoned and fearful because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In these days of deep uncertainty about the future, let us keep in mind the Lord's word to his Servant, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you" (*Is* 43:1). In our charity, may we speak words of reassurance and help others to realize that God loves them as sons and daughters.

~ Every moment of our lives is a time for believing, hoping and loving. The call to experience Lent as a journey of conversion, prayer and sharing of our goods, helps us – as communities and as individuals – to revive the faith that comes from the living Christ, the hope inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit and the love flowing from the merciful heart of the Father.