

Pastoral Letter on Great Lent

Dear Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and my dear people,

Once again we are at the threshold of the great Lent in preparation for the commemoration of the paschal event of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Repent and believe in the Gospel (Mk. 1:15) is the consistent reminder at every Lent. It is often devoutly observed with fasting and some abstinences. It is good and highly encouraging, provided our fasting and abstinences lead us to help the less privileged in the society from our savings of such observances. However I feel that fasting and abstinences from obsessions and oppressions matters a greater sacrifice and probably very hard to practice. Such positive approach towards lenten fasting and observance is greatly helpful for oneself and for others.

In such direction, three areas that we need to focus our attention are; (i) Ameliorate human relations, (ii) Share with others our savings from Lenten fasting and abstinences, and (iii) A greater commitment to one's faith in life-witness.

- (i) Ameliorate human relations: We all know that it is relationship that makes us genuinely human. We are 'social animals' who *relate*, with reason and in season. There is rationality in all our human relations. So we are also called rational animal. When we look at rationality-less, we are not different from animals. In such a state, our acts are senseless, without compassion and sometimes even cruel. Needless to say in such instances our lenten observances and even spiritual exercises become meaningless and futile! In short, Lent should improve or make better our human relations – a sense of community feeling seeking the welfare of others. "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." (Mt. 5: 23-24).
- (ii) Sharing with others: In chapter 58, the prophet Isaiah articulates what is meant by genuine fasting: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" (Vs. 6). Genuine fasting invites one to live together in peace and in perfect harmony. The pioneering Christian community lived together sharing their earnings (Acts. 4:32-35). They had compassion for others and loved one another genuinely and shared with others generously. "Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you" (Mt. 5:42).
- (iii) Life-witnesses: The spiritual effects of genuine Lenten practice is growth in faith. It, in turn invites us to be genuine social beings. It is nothing but growing in vertical and horizontal levels - towards God and others. A greater enthusiasm will be shown to live as human and Christian. It helps one to overcome the temptations/chances of pseudo spirituality. It will be a life fully human and fully alive in mundane and in divine realms. Glory of God is man fully alive. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).

I am reminded of the suggestions of Pope Francis in 2019; the 10 ways to observe Lent meaningfully in the modern context. A reading of it is worth:

Pope Francis' Words

Do you want to fast this Lent?

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your heart with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

So, dear missionaries and dear people, let us resolve to observe the great Lent of 2021 in a fruitful way.

May God bless you all.

Yours devotedly in Jesus Christ,



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