

Dear Friends,

As we prepare our hearts for the holy season of Lent which begins this week, I want to share with you a portion of the Lenten message from our Holy Father, Pope Francis.

Each year, through Mother Church, God “gives us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed... as we recall the great events that gave us new life in Christ” (*Preface of Lent I*).

...The celebration of the Paschal Triduum of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, the culmination of the liturgical year, calls us yearly to undertake a journey of preparation, in the knowledge that our being conformed to Christ (cf. *Rom 8:29*) is a priceless gift of God’s mercy.

...Creation urgently needs the revelation of the children of God, who have been made “a new creation”. For “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (*2 Cor 5:17*). Indeed, by virtue of their being revealed, *creation itself can celebrate a Pasch*, opening itself to a new heaven and a new earth (cf. *Rev 21:1*). The path to Easter demands that we renew our faces and hearts as Christians through repentance, conversion and forgiveness, so as to live fully the abundant grace of the paschal mystery.

This “eager longing”, this expectation of all creation, will be fulfilled in the revelation of the children of God, that is, when Christians and all people enter decisively into the “travail” that conversion entails. All creation is called, with us, to go forth “from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (*Rom 8:21*). Lent is a sacramental sign of this conversion. It invites Christians to embody the paschal mystery more deeply and concretely in their personal, family, and social lives, above all by fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

Fasting, that is, learning to change our attitude towards others and all of creation, turning away from the temptation to “devour” everything to satisfy our voracity and being ready to suffer for love, which can fill the emptiness of our hearts. **Prayer**, which teaches us to abandon idolatry and the self-sufficiency of our ego, and to acknowledge our need of the Lord and his mercy. **Almsgiving**, whereby we escape from the insanity of hoarding everything for ourselves in the illusory belief that we can secure a future that does not belong to us. And thus, to rediscover the joy of God’s plan for creation and for each of us, which is to love Him, our brothers and sisters, and the entire world, and to find in this love our true happiness.

Dear brothers and sisters, the “Lenten” period of forty days spent by the Son of God in the *desert* of creation had the goal of making it once more that *garden* of communion with God that it was before original sin (cf. *Mk 1:12-13*; *Is 51:3*). May our Lent this year be a journey along that same path, bringing the hope of Christ also to creation, so that it may be “set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (*Rom 8:21*). Let us not allow this season of grace to pass in vain! Let us ask God to help us set out on a path of true conversion. Let us leave behind our selfishness and self-absorption and turn to Jesus’ Pasch. Let us stand beside our brothers and sisters in need, sharing our spiritual and material goods with them. In this way, by concretely welcoming Christ’s victory over sin and death into our lives, we will also radiate its transforming power to all of creation.

From the Vatican, 4 October 2018,
Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi

Sincerely yours in Jesus Christ,



Fr. Jack D. Shrum
Pastor