

LENTEN MESSAGE PASTORAL LETTER 2017

My dear people of God,

Praised be Our Lord Jesus Christ and Mother Mary !!!

Lent is a time of silence, a time of prayer, a time to listen to the word of God, sharpen our ears to listen to Word of God, a time of fast and abstinence, a time to do charity to others, and a time to relive the passion, death and resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ.

Lent invites all of us to return from our evil ways to the ways of God by repentance. "Return to me and I will return to you" (Mal 3:7). Return from a situation of hard heartedness to a life of conversion and change! The one who created us is God. God is our Father. He is a Merciful Father. He is the Father of mercies. His nature is mercy. This mercy is the source of peace, joy and love. "Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy" (Mt 5:7). Let us try to comprehend this Mercy of God the Father through the parable of the 'prodigal son'. As the lost son was led into the embrace of his loving and merciful father let us also listen to the word of God and enter into a new life in our Father's house. But go and learn what this means: "I desire Mercy, not Sacrifice, for I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Mt 9:13). "Since all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God" (Rom 3:23). "In returning and rest, you shall be saved" (Is 30:15).

We are people who on the one hand, want to listen to Jesus, but on the other hand, at times, like to find a stick to beat others, to condemn others, to judge others rashly and engaging ourselves in character assassination by calumny. "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14). This is a great challenge to all of us Christians who follow our master who washed the feet of his own disciples. At least in this Lenten time let us not engage ourselves in character assassination. "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Mt 7:1-4). Let this Lent help us introspect ourselves and find the moments we have condemned others or we have engaged ourselves in character assassination!!! Jesus our Master says, "I have come to save the sinners to repentance and not to condemn the world" (Jn 3:17).

Life of a Christian is to empty his life as our Master did. But "He emptied himself taking the form of a slave being born in the human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on cross" (Phil 2:7). "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2Cor 8:9). Our call to Christian life is a call to serve. He came not to be served but 'to serve and to give my life as a ransom' (Mk 10:42-45). This is the challenge that Christian life throws in front of us. How to empty ourselves of our pride and egoism!! Our vested interest has to be crucified with Jesus that we are able resurrect with him. "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself to me" (Gal 2:20).

Lent is a time to listen to the word of God. Let us listen and learn by listening. Let us be renewed by God's mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of his mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish. "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezek 36:26). God's mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can "restore life to dry bones" (Ezek 37). "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom 8:9).

This Lent calls us to conversion and change. Root out our bad habits of condemning others and falsely judging others. When we condemn others we condemn Jesus himself to death. We kill people by character assassination. Let us say always "Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they are doing". Let us pray for people who are destroying our own community. Jesus is our master and He is our life. "I am the resurrection and Life and whoever believes in me though he die yet he will live" (Jn 11:25).

I wish you all a fruitful holy week and A very Happy Easter with reliving the mysteries of Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ !!!

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01-03-2017

Please read this circular in all the churches during the mass time on the third Sunday of Lent.