

LENT 2021

DO YOU WANT TO FAST THIS LENT?

Pope Francis tells us How:

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 worried and have trust in God.

Fast from complaints; contemplate simplicity.

Fast from pressures and be prayerful

Fast from bitterness; fill your hearts with joy.

Fast from selfishness and be. Compassionate.

Fast from grudges and be reconciled

Fast from words; be silent and listen

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LENT?

According to Philip Endean SJ, Lent cannot be a time for wallowing in the negative. The English word 'Lent' comes from the same root as 'length'. Lent, the time of spring's first stirrings, is a time for our being lengthened. We are to grow into the full stature of Christ, to move nearer the kingdom prepared for us before the world's foundation. It may be very noble, and may meet some psychological need within ourselves, to think about Lent as our trying hard, as Lent being our effort. But when we think that way, the focus is probably on ourselves. ***What Lent is really about is opening ourselves to someone else, about stretching ourselves, so that we can receive the gift of new life coming from God alone.***

Some people think that Lent is about resisting our temptations to chocolate or alcohol, that doing this we somehow gain merit, and rise above mere sensuality.

But this way of thinking does not have much to do with the gospel. When Matthew and Luke in their different ways name the temptations Jesus faces, it seems as though Jesus himself is growing into, being stretched towards, the full reality of his mission. He has to recognize that his way is not that of simple miracle-working. He has to realize that his kingdom is a kingdom given from above, and therefore not of this world (John 18: 36-37). Jesus is not proving his moral fibre, but growing in his sense of his own identity.

The mindset we bring to Lent is very important. Lent is ‘this great season of grace’, God’s gift to the Church. Lent places us before the author and pioneer of our faith, Jesus Christ, and asks us how we might follow him more deeply. Lent is only Christian if it is positive.

Lent is for lengthening, not for constriction. As we begin the forty days, we need to ask the Spirit where we are being called, here and now, to grow. We need to ask ourselves what we must do in order to further that divine purpose. We need to stop confining ourselves, and instead be open to the one who calls light out of darkness, brings life out of death. It is not really about our effort, still less about our looking miserable. Rather, with humble pride, we boast that all we can do is to plant and to water. The real growth, the true lengthening, comes from God (1 Corinthians 3:5-7).

Philip Endean SJ is Professor of Spirituality at Centre Sèvres, Paris.

Renewing faith, hope and love: Pope Francis’ message for Lent 2021

In his message for Lent 2021, Pope Francis calls on the faithful to “renew our faith, draw from the living waters of hope, and receive with open hearts the love of God.” The Pope sums it up in his last paragraph:

“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.”

Pope Francis focuses on the three theological virtues in his Lenten message for 2021, inviting the faithful to “renew our faith, draw from the living waters of hope, and receive with open hearts the love of God.”

Grounding his reflection on the Paschal Mystery, the Pope says, “This Lenten journey... is even now illumined by the light of the resurrection, which inspires the thoughts, attitudes and decisions of the followers of Jesus.”

He goes on to say that the journey of conversion, through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, “makes it possible for us to live lives of sincere faith, living hope, and effective charity.”

Accepting and bearing witness to the truth

The Holy Father explains “accepting and living the truth revealed in Christ means, first of all, opening our hearts to God’s word.” Through fasting, “experienced as a form of self-denial,” we are able “to rediscover God’s gift and recognize that, created in His image and likeness, we find our fulfillment in Him.” Fasting, too, by helping us recognize our own poverty, helps us to love both God and neighbour. “Lent is a time for believing,” the Pope says, “for welcoming God into our lives and allowing Him to ‘make His dwelling’ in us.”

The ‘living water’ that helps us on the journey

Pope Francis relates the virtue of hope to the ‘living water’ that Jesus promises the Samaritan woman at the well. This is not the physical water the woman is expecting, but rather the Holy Spirit who is given through the Paschal Mystery. Although hope may seem challenging in fragile and uncertain times, “Lent is precisely the season of hope, when we turn back to God.”

Hope, he says, “is given to us as inspiration and interior light” through “recollection and silent prayer.” The experience of hope in Lent, he says, “means receiving the hope of Christ, who gave His life on the Cross and was raised by God on the third day.”

Love, the highest expression of faith and hope

“Love is a leap of the heart,” says Pope Francis. “It brings us out of ourselves and creates bonds of sharing and communion.”

The Holy Father emphasizes the need for “social love” in building up “a civilization of love.”

“Love is a gift that gives meaning to our lives,” he says. Love helps us to see all men and women as our brothers and sisters. Charity is multiplied when given with love, as we see not only in the Scriptures, but in our own lives, too, when we give alms “with joy and simplicity.”

“To experience Lent with love,” says Pope Francis, “means caring for those who suffer or feel abandoned because of the Covid-19 pandemic.” He invites us to

“speak words of reassurance, and help others to realize that God loves them as sons and daughters.”

A journey of conversion

After reminding us that “every moment of our lives is a time for believing, hoping, and loving,” Pope Francis concludes by saying:

“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.”