Ash Wednesday

Gospel text (*Mt* 6:1-6.16-18): Jesus said to his disciples: “Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms (…), when you pray (…), when you fast (…), [do it] for your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you».

Ash Wednesday: the beginning of the Lenten season

EDITORIAL TEAM evangeli.net (based on texts by Benedict XVI)
(Città del Vaticano, Vatican)

Today we initiate Lent with Ash Wednesday’s own unique symbolic rites: 1. The penitential procession, which symbolizes the personal and communitarian pilgrimage of conversion and spiritual renewal; 2. The distribution of ashes, which means the call to correspond with sincerity of soul and coherence of works. Lent is a time of purification —as its liturgical color expresses— and the whole of it is focused in the Redemption mystery.

As a path of authentic conversion and more intense spiritual preparation to celebrate Easter, the liturgy sets before us again three penitential practices to which the biblical Christian tradition confers great value: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The whole Christian life is indeed a fight without pauses, in which we should use these three "weapons".

—To die to oneself in order to live in God is the ascetic journey that all Jesus’ disciples are called to travel with humility and patience, with generosity and perseverance.

Lent. Almsgiving

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Today we contemplate Lent as a privileged time of interior pilgrimage towards He who is the source of mercy. One of the proposed Lenten tasks is almsgiving: It represents a specific way to assist those in need and, at the same time, an exercise in self-denial to free us from attachment to worldly goods.

Almsgiving helps us to overcome this constant temptation of serving "two lords" (God and mammon), teaching us to respond to our neighbor’s needs and to share with others whatever we possess through divine goodness. The Evangelical charity is not mere philanthropy; rather it is a concrete expression of charity, a theological virtue that demands interior conversion to love of God and neighbor, in imitation of

Jesus Christ, who dying on the cross, gave His entire self for us.

—Lent encourages us to follow the example of the "poor widow", whose charity did not consist simply in giving all she had to live on, but what she was: her entire self.

Lent. Fasting

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Today with the beginning of Lent, we consider the forty days of fasting that the Lord lived in the desert before starting His public ministry. Just like Moses before receiving the Tablets of the Law or Elijah before meeting with the Lord on Mount Horeb, Jesus Christ in praying and fasting prepared Himself for His ministry that started with a tough encounter with the tempter.

The Holy Scriptures and the entire Christian tradition teach that fasting is a great help to avoid sin and all that leads to it. Since sin oppresses us all, we offer fasting as a means to restore friendship with the Lord. In the New Testament, Jesus —preventing the hypocrisy of some Pharisees— indicates the true reasons of fasting: eating “the real food”, which is doing the will of the Father. Ultimately, it is about fasting based our own will.

—With fasting, Lord, I humbly submit to You, trusting in Your goodness and mercy.