



The Joy of Lent

Arturo Sosa SJ

The Homily of Fr. General, Arturo Sosa, for JDV, Pune [Ash Wednesday — March 6, 2019]

Readings: Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51:3-6, 12-14, 17; 2 Cor 5:20 - 6:2; Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

Today, Ash Wednesday, we begin the holy season of Lent. The word 'Lent' usually brings to mind rather sad and drab images of fasting, penance, abstinence, purple robes, no singing of the 'Alleluia' and 'Gloria', etc. All this makes us reluctant to begin this apparently dull and dreary season; and somehow, we hope that this season finishes quickly so that we can resume our normal, happy lives. However, if we reflect carefully on the tone of today's liturgy, and on the readings, we might change our view and our disposition for this 40-day period of Lent.

I bring to your attention one of the opening lines of the First Preface of Lent, which reads: "By your gracious gift each year your faithful await the sacred paschal feasts with the joy of minds made pure." Two words here are striking: gift and joy. Lent is God's gift to us, and Lent must fill us with

great joy — the joy of returning to God — the God who fills us with joy, restores us and reconciles us with Himself, with all His children, and with all His creatures.

The first reading from Prophet Joel has a loving invitation to retrace our footsteps away from our errant paths to get back to God. "Return to me with all your heart..." God invites me and you to return to Him "with all our heart", which signifies the totality of our being. How lovely it is to return to our God of Love, merciful Abba, with all our heart! The reading goes on to tell us: "God is all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, and ready to relent. Yes, let us experience God's tender love and boundless compassion!

The second reading from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians is another invitation to become agents of reconciliation in today's broken world. It is precisely this mission which the God Of Love calls us, Jesuits, and all our co-workers, collaborators, students, benefactors and friends, to be convinced about, and committed to — that is, what Decree I of our GC 36 expresses as our common call to be: "Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice". Aware of his own sinfulness and the amazing graces he has received, Paul writes: "We are ambassadors of Christ, it is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: Be reconciled to God." Paul is a man aflame with a mission. He says, "See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" No postponements!

In the Gospel passage (according to Matthew), Jesus highlights what we must do, now, and be, now! He seems to summarize what Prophet Joel and Apostle Paul have advised us to do and be. Jesus is very precise and practical. He

suggests three spiritual disciplines, which you, in India, call 'sadhanas': prayer, fasting and alms-giving. What do these three require of us?

First and foremost, prayer, contemplation, meditation and the Eucharist bring about our reconciliation with God, Second, alms-giving makes us aware of the 'poor' — the millions of our sisters and brothers who are struggling to survive in our selfish world. True alms-giving means not only generously giving what we 'have' but who we 'are' — a self-giving. It reconciles us with all of humankind. Third, fasting creates an awareness of God's generosity through the gifts of nature. We voluntarily deprive ourselves of food and detach ourselves from the many comforts and goods which we have become so dependent upon. Fasting could help us to be reconciled with mother earth (creation) and with all God's creatures.

As we enter into this season of Lent, let us not forget these three acts of love, and let us strive for the triple reconciliation — with God, with others, and with nature. May we be mindful of Pope Francis's constant reminder that our God is a God of mercy. Hence, saying the prayer of repentant King David in today's psalm, "A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me," let us return to God with all our heart—full of joy! May our Lenten season be a time of grace and reconciliation, bringing joy and peace to all those we will encounter.

I am truly happy to begin this season of Lent here, at JDV—Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth—the 'Light of Knowledge' Academy. As "companions of Christ on a mission of reconciliation and justice", my prayer for you is that you continue being 'lights' amidst the darkness of selfishness and sin. May the knowledge we cultivate be enlightening and em-

powering for all.

I end with that beautiful prayer from the Upanishads:

"O God, from untruth, lead us to truth;

from darkness, lead us to light;

from death, lead us to eternal life,

Amen."

Rt Rev Arturo Marcelino Sosa Abascal SJ visited Papal Seminary on March 6, 2019. Even though many Generals have visited the Seminary, he is the first one to show personal concern towards working staff of the Seminary like myself. We got the great privilege of serving food to him. He was even humble enough to click a photo with the staff. We consider it a great privilege and all of us very happy that he honoured the staff during his visit. We convey our gratitude and greetings to him. -Meena Chandu Hanchamani