

FIAMC MESSAGE FOR LENT (2017)

A time to say “no”, with Pope Francis

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We entered few days ago, as every year, the season of Lent: a path of forty days leading to Easter, Christ's victory over death and the glory of Resurrection..

This path is offered to us as an opportunity for conversion, internal renewal: it is a question of making anew our house, as in spring cleaning,

1) By cleaning it, removing the dust, throwing old, useless things which bother us and are in our way, repairing what is broken, split, made rusty, what seems to hold still but is quite rotted by behind.

2) By doing it up like new, bringing new things instead of the old, redo the painting, change the shutters, redo a staircase, change the beam of a roof, fit out the common room to receive in a better way family and friends

Lent “urgently calls us to conversion”

We completely agree with this beautiful prospect, but when it comes to materialize it we are much more uncertain. At first, where should we start? On what point should we concentrate our effort? More prayer? More fasting and privations? To contribute financially to noble causes ? To go to visit sick people, or aged uncles and aunts far away living?

All this is quite good . But before embarking in concrete actions, it is indicated to think about it: what is actually important in Lent? What is the spirit which has to lead us? Is there anything more specific, for us, Christian doctors?

The first thing that is necessary for Lent, and may be it is the most important, is to bring to an upper level our desire to be Christians, to live as Christians, to follow Jesus in ordinary life, in his footsteps. It is necessary to shake us, to get out of the spiritual sleepiness into which the routine of every day plunges us, as well as the multiple associated requests, distractions, obligations, particularly in professional life. ” *To deepen our spiritual life through*” is what proposes us Pope Francis as a program for Lent, that is to reach an upper level in spiritual life, as when we rise the current which passes through an electric installation in order to get more out of it..

And ” *To refuse to settle for mediocrity*” adds Pope Francis. This means not contenting oneself with “the least”: the least in the time dedicated to God in prayer, the least in the time granted to those who bother us, the least in the time given to the sick person who consults us. This means to shift from a lifestyle dominated by the fear of being too much in demand, to a more generous lifestyle, rich in initiatives, ” in the breath of the Spirit “.

A time to go to the Word of God

To deepen the life of the spirit, the Church offers us, indeed, the traditional means of sanctification which always give results: ” *fasting, prayer and almsgiving*” .

But, above all, “*at the basis of everything is the Word of God, which during this season of Lent we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply*” .

It is the Word of God which allows us to resist the insidious temptations, as Jesus resisted them in the desert, and to enter Lent with a strong spirit.

” *During the forty days of Lent, as Christians, we are invited to follow in Jesus' footsteps and face the spiritual battle with the Evil One with the strength of the Word of God. Not with our words: they are worthless. The Word of God: this has the strength to defeat Satan* ” .

” Someone has asked: what would happen were we to treat the Bible as we treat our mobile phone?; were we to always carry it with us, or at least a small, pocket-sized Gospel, what would happen? were we to open it several times a day; were we to read God’s messages contained in the Bible as we read telephone messages, what would happen?” (Angelus of March 5th).

That is why the first proposal which Pope Francis presents us, for this 2017 Lent is to go more often to the Word of God, carrying with us a small Gospel, in our pocket, and to read it regularly, during the day, to have the Word of God in the heart.

A time to say “no”

The second proposal which presents us Pope Francis is paradoxical because it is a negative one: it is to be able to say “no”. No to what? No to all which prevents us from breathing, to what “asphyxiates” us, to what dries out the Word of God in us. It is a question of freeing us from our “old friends” as said saint Augustine, of all which hold us “glue-coated”, incapable to take off.

” Lent is a path: it leads to the triumph of mercy over all that would crush us or reduce us to something unworthy of our dignity as God’s children” . What are these “asphyxiations” which prevent us from breathing as Christians, to be really free spiritually? Pope Francis quotes them:

” The stifling asphyxia brought on by our selfishness, the stifling asphyxia generated by petty ambition and silent indifference – an asphyxia that smothers the spirit, narrows our horizons and slows the beating of our hearts” “

This “spiritual asphyxiation” which insidiously comes to cool our heart, has for consequences “to cut our legs off from the faith”, to change our Christian life into a boring or heavy routine. It “*dampens our faith, cools our charity and strangles every hope*”.

This is why to “live Lent”, it is “to yearn for “*this breath of God’s life that saves us from this asphyxia*”.

Lent is thus the time to say “no” to the asphyxia of the spirit “caused by our love of ourselves when it leads us to want always to be above the others, no to our jealousies, resentments, unfavorable inner judgments on the others, no to “*our harsh and hasty criticisms, and simplistic analyses*”, no to our carelessness which leads us to “*think that other people’s lives are not our concern*”, no to our indifferences, no to our superficiality

Lent is also a season to say “no” to the soothing of our conscience at a cheap price, to our subterfuges to be satisfied with ourselves, to our almsgiving when they turn to be charities to ourselves that make us “feel good”.

A time to find the wounds of Christ present in the wounds of one’s brothers and sisters

To say “no” to oneself, to one’s “ego”, to one’s small personal vanity, to one’s thirst to dominate, to one’s spirit of criticism, it is at the same time to open oneself to the others, to open oneself to their difficulties, to their fears, to their hopes.

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luc 16, 10-31) is at the heart of the message of Lent: Pope Francis asks us to open the eyes in order to see Lazarus at our door, and to know how to spend time for him, to give him clothes, shelter and money, and to tire ourselves for him. Not to Lazarus-figure or number, but to Lazarus as a person, who has a name, who is clothed with rags, and has only dogs as friends, licking his sores.

” The poor person at the door of the rich is not a nuisance, but a summons to conversion and to change”. What is the problem of the rich in the parable? It is not the fact that he is rich and Lazarus poor, but the fact that he is corrupted by his wealth which prevents him from seeing the poor at his door. Pope Francis gives us his own parable to enlighten us:

“And it would help us,” he said, to think about how we would feel about a man who, after a meal that cost 200 euros, for example, returns home and sees someone hungry, and doesn’t look at him and keeps walking.”

Lazarus, in the parable, has a face, he is a person, he is a “priceless treasure” as such. He is in fact a gift for the rich, that could help him to get out of his corrupting wealth for opening himself to the other, if only he saw Lazarus, and if only he saw Christ in Lazarus.

” *Each life that we encounter is a gift deserving acceptance, respect and love*”” *Lent is a favorable season for opening the doors to all those in need and recognizing in them the face of Christ*” ”

“*Lent is a time for saying no to the spiritual asphyxia born of the pollution caused by indifference*””, *our culture of exclusion*” ” *of relationships that exclude, that try to find God while avoiding the wounds of Christ present in the wounds of his brother and sisters*” ,.

For the Christian medical doctor

This message of Lent applies to all Christians, and thus applies to Christian medical doctors. But it has may be something more to ask the Christian medical doctor, because this one is directly in relation with all the Lazarus of the earth, even those who are well dressed and who do not have dogs to lick their sores. What threatens the Christian medical doctor, in his spiritual life as in his ideal of medical doctor is this insidious “asphyxia” of which speaks Pope Francis, caused by a mixture of ” narrow-minded ambitions”, excessive attachment to money (“ *the devil who enters through the pocket* ” says Pope Francis), progressive indifference, and ” good conscience” which comes from the exercise of an apparently altruistic profession. He has to shake himself, to get out of spiritual sleepiness, to shift in his crowded timetable from an exercise of justice to an exercise of just generosity, ”*setting aside everything that isolates us, encloses us and paralyzes us*”” Lent is the time to say, with the Psalmist:

” **Restore to us the joy of your salvation, sustain in us a willing spirit**”. (Ps 51, 14).