

## Pope's Message for Lent 2015

# "Make your hearts firm"

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"Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each communities and every believer. Above all it is a 'time of grace'. His love does not allow Him to be indifferent to what happens to us. Usually, when we are healthy and comfortable, we forget about others (something God the Father never does): we are unconcerned with their problems, their sufferings and the injustices they endure. Our heart grows cold.

One of the most urgent challenges which I would like to address in this Message is precisely the globalisation of indifference.

God is not indifferent to our world; he so loves it that he gave his Son for our salvation. In the Incarnation, in the earthly life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, the gate between God and man, between heaven and earth, opens once for all. The Church is like the hand holding open this gate, thanks to her proclamation of God's word, her celebration of the sacraments and her witness of the faith which works through love. But the world tends to withdraw into itself and shut that door through which God comes into the world and the world comes to him. Hence the hand, which is the Church, must never be surprised if it is rejected, crushed and wounded. God's people, then, need this interior renewal, lest we become indifferent and withdraw into ourselves.

To further this renewal, I would like to propose for our reflection three biblical texts.

### **1. 'If one member suffers, all suffer together' – The Church**

Christians are those who let God clothe them with goodness and mercy. This is clearly seen in the liturgy of Holy Thursday, with its rite of the washing of feet. Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet, but he came to realise that Jesus does not wish to be just an example of how we should wash one another's feet. Only those who have first allowed Jesus to wash their own feet can then offer this service to others. Only they have 'a part' with him and thus can serve others.

Lent is a favourable time for letting Christ serve us so that we in turn may become more like him. This happens whenever we hear the word of God and receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. There we become what we receive: the Body of Christ. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honoured, all the parts share its joy'.

## **2. 'Where is your brother?' – Parishes and Communities**

Do these ecclesial structures enable us to experience being part of one body? A body which acknowledges and cares for its weakest, poorest and most insignificant members? Or do we take refuge in a universal love that would embrace the whole world, while failing to see the Lazarus sitting before our closed doors?

In order to receive what God gives us and to make it bear abundant fruit, we need to press beyond the boundaries of the visible Church in two ways. In the first place, by uniting ourselves in prayer with the Church in heaven. The saints already joyfully contemplate the fact that, through Jesus' death and resurrection, they have triumphed once and for all over indifference, hardness of heart and hatred. Until this victory of love penetrates the whole world, the saints continue to accompany us on our pilgrim way.

In the second place, every Christian community is called to go out of itself and to be engaged in the life of the greater society of which it is a part, especially with the poor and those who are far away. In each of our neighbours, then, we must see a brother or sister for whom Christ died and rose again. What we ourselves have received, we have received for them as well.

## **3. 'Make your hearts firm!' – Individual Christians**

As individuals too, we are tempted by indifference. Flooded with news reports and troubling images of human suffering, we often feel our complete inability to help. What can we do to avoid being caught up in this spiral of distress and powerlessness?

First, we can pray in communion with the Church on earth and in heaven. Let us not underestimate the power of so many voices united in prayer! The '24 Hours for the Lord' initiative, which I hope will be observed on 13-14 March throughout the Church, also at the diocesan level, is meant to be a sign of this need for prayer.

Second, we can help by acts of charity, reaching out to both those near and far through the Church's many charitable organisations.

Third, the suffering of others is a call to conversion, since their need reminds me of the uncertainty of my own life and my dependence on God and my brothers and sisters. We will also be able to resist the diabolical temptation of thinking that by our own efforts we can save the world and ourselves.

I would invite everyone to live this Lent as an opportunity for engaging in what Benedict XVI called a formation of the heart. A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. During this Lent, then, brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord: *'Fac cor nostrum secundum cor tuum'*: Make our hearts like yours (Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). In this way we will receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalisation of indifference.

It is my prayerful hope that this Lent will prove spiritually fruitful for each believer and every ecclesial community. I ask all of you to pray for me. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady keep you”.