



Simla Chandigarh Diocese

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Lenten Pastoral Letter - 2022

Dear Fathers, Sisters and Brothers,

This year Lent begins almost immediately on 2nd March 2022 and like spring time in nature, it's a season favorable for personal and community renewal, through prayer, fast and almsgiving. This season leads us to the celebration of the paschal mystery the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The ashes are placed on our heads in the sign of the Cross and so we are sinners who have hope. The church repeats to us a powerful appeal which the prophet Joel addressed to the people of Israel: Now-it is the Lord who speaks come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, and mourning. The expression with all your heart is important: it means from the core of our thoughts and feelings, from the spring of our free decisions, choices, and actions. Yes, there is a power which does not reside in our own hearts, but springs from God's own heart. It is the power of his mercy. The prophet Joel goes on to say: Turn to the Lord your God again, for he is all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, and ready to relent. Through prayer, fasting, spiritual reading, spiritual advice, sorting out our hidden motivations, we develop a sense of what God wants of us.

In his message for Lent 2022, Pope Francis, reminds us of Saint Paul's exhortation to the Galatians: "*Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all*" (Gal 6:9-10). In God, no act of love, no matter how small, and no "generous effort" will ever be lost (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 279). Just as we recognize a tree by its fruits (cf. Mt 7:16, 20), so a life full of good deeds radiates light (cf. Mt 5:14-16) and carries the fragrance of Christ to the world (cf. 2 Cor 2:15).

Lent is a favourable time to seek out and not to avoid those in need; to reach out – and not to ignore – those who need a sympathetic ear and a good word; to visit – and not to abandon – those who are lonely. Let us put into practice our call to do good to all, and take time to love the poor and needy, those abandoned and rejected, those discriminated against and marginalized (cf. Fratelli Tutti, 193). Lent invites us to stretch our hands our hearts to our neighbor and the needy. In other words to do what we should do all the time. Our Holy Father Pope Francis himself has given a universal call to make the forthcoming Ash Wednesday (the 2nd of March) a day of fasting and prayer, particularly for peace in Ukraine and Russia.

Archbishop Filipe Neri Ferrão -President, Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India in the circular to the bishops, has stated that we need to begin and keep praying with intensity even now, as the conflict continues to rage with every passing day, not showing any signs of abatement. Let us therefore raise in prayer to the Almighty the highly volatile situation in Eastern Europe and in some other parts of the globe and earnestly pray for world peace. As we enter the Lenten Season, let us remind ourselves that only Christ can deliver us from the clutches of the Evil One, whose chief strategy is to sow disunity and discord among peoples and individuals. May our prayer and sacrifice help combat and vanquish the forces which seek to divide the human family and instead promote conflict and warfare.

May the Virgin Mary, who bore the Saviour in her womb, may she accompany us with her maternal presence, so that this season of conversion may bring forth fruits of eternal salvation.

With all prayers in this holy season of Lent and blessings for Easter.

Given on 26th February 2022, the Feast of St Maria Bertilla Boscardin-Italy. *This Lenten Pastoral Letter is to be read out or its contents to be explained in Hindi or Punjabi in all Churches on 1st or 2nd Sunday of Lent.*

Yours sincerely in Christ

+Ignatius Mascarenhas

Bishop of Simla Chandigarh



