



Simla Chandigarh Diocese

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Lent the time to free ourselves from the illusion of chasing after dust

On 26th February 2020 we commenced the Lenten season with Ash Wednesday and our foreheads were marked with the sign of the cross with ash. This was to remind us that, we are to fix our gaze throughout this Lenten journey upon Christ; the crucified one. For Jesus on the cross is life's compass, which directs us to the way, the truth and the life.

You will recall the words "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" or "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" as the sign of the cross with ash was marked on our foreheads. The small mark of ash which we received was a simple yet real reminder that of many things occupying our thoughts, we chase after and worry about every day, in the end nothing will remain. No matter how hard we work we will take no wealth no wine and no passing pleasures with us from this life. Earthly realities fade away like dust in the wind. Possessions are temporary, power passes, and success fades. The culture of appearance prevalent today, which persuades us to live for passing things, is a great deception. Lent is the time to free ourselves from the illusion of chasing after dust.

Lent is for rediscovering that we are created for the eternal flame/eternal light, not for ashes that immediately disappear; for God and not for the world; for the eternity of heaven not for earthly deceit; for the freedom of the children of God not for slavery of things. We should ask ourselves today, where do I stand? Do I live for eternal fire-eternal light or for ash-dust? Hence on this Lenten journey, we go back to what is essential, The Gospel proposed three steps which the Lord invites us to undertake without hypocrisy and pretense; the three great practices of Lent—prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

What are they for? They are three things *you do*; pray, fast, and give alms.

For Prayer reunites us with God; it frees us from that horizontal and routine life where we find time for self but forget God. And as you do, pray to draw closer to the Lord as the center of your life—and the reason you do everything.

Charity, to our neighbor; invites us to focus on others, frees us from the vanity of acquiring and of thinking that things are only good if they are good for me. That we will be generous in our almsgiving this Lent, and attentive to the poor.

Fasting, which frees us from the attachment to things and from the worldliness that numbs the heart.

Lent-shows us this. It begins with ashes, but eventually leads us to the fire of Easter night; to the discovery that in the tomb, the body of Jesus does not turn to ashes, but rises gloriously. This is true also for us, who are dust. If we with our weaknesses return to the Lord, if we take the path-of love, then we will embrace the life that never ends. Be sincere and true. A double life, a secret dark life is stressful. *"We must all accept our dark side. The more we run away, the more it catches up"*. There is an urgent need for personal conversion, without which the temptations of Satan, and the presence of evil, create a "hell here on earth," Pope Francis said in his 2020 Lenten message.

We are called to *"Keep your eyes fixed on the outstretched arms of Christ crucified, let yourself be saved over and over again. And when you go to confess your sins, believe firmly in his mercy which frees you of your guilt. Contemplate his blood poured out with such great love, and let yourself be cleansed by it. In this way, you can be reborn ever anew"* said Pope Francis. *"May we not let this time of grace pass in vain, in the foolish illusion that we can control the times and means of our conversion to him,"* he urged.

"I ask Mary Most Holy to pray that our Lenten celebration will open our hearts to hear God's call to be reconciled to himself, to fix our gaze on the paschal mystery, and to be converted to an open and sincere dialogue with him."

I wish you all a good Lenten journey and experience a grace-filled Lenten Season and New-Life in Easter 2020.

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.

Given on the feast of St. Hilary, 46th Pope in 461, on Saturday, 29.02.2020 at the Bishop's House, Chandigarh.

Yours Sincerely in Christ

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