**On the Season of Lent**

**"Lent comes to us as a providential time to change course, to regain the capacity to react in face of the reality of evil that always challenges us"**

VATICAN CITY, March 05, 2014 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org/?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch)) - Here is the translation of the Holy Father’s address today during his weekly General Audience in St. Peter’s Square.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

Today, Ash Wednesday, the forty-day Lenten itinerary begins, which will lead us to the Easter Triduum, memorial of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord, heart and center of the mystery of our salvation. Lent prepares us for this moment that is so important, for this “intense” time, a turning point which can foster a change in each one of us, conversion. We all have needed to become better, to change for the better. Lent helps us and thus [allows us] to come out of our weary habits and lazy addiction to the evil that deceives us. In the Lenten season the Church addresses to us two important invitations: to have a more lively awareness of Christ’s redemptive work and to live our Baptism with greater commitment.

The awareness of the wonders that the Lord has done for our salvation disposes our mind and our heart to an attitude of gratitude to God, for all that He has given us, for all that he fulfills for His people and the whole of humanity. Our conversion begins here: it is our grateful answer to the stupendous mystery of the love of God. When we see this love that God has for us, we feel the need to come closer to him: this is conversion.

To live our Baptism through and through – this is the second invitation – means not to be accustomed to situations of degradation and misery, which we meet when walking through the streets of our cities and our countries. There is the risk of accepting passively certain behaviors and to not be astounded in face of the sad realities that surround us. We are accustomed to violence, as if it were daily news taken for granted; we are accustomed to brothers and sisters sleeping on the street, which have no roof for shelter. We are accustomed to refugees in search of liberty and dignity, who are not received as they should be. We are accustomed to live in a society that pretends to do without God, in which parents no longer teach their children to pray or to make the sign of the cross. I would like to as you: your children, do they know how to make the sign of the cross? Think about it. Do your grandchildren know how to make the sign of the cross? Did you teach them? Think about it and respond in your hearts. Do they know how to pray the Our Father? Do they know how to pray to Our Lady with the Hail Mary? Think and answer for yourselves. This addiction to non-Christian behaviors and to comfort drugs our heart!

Lent comes to us as a providential time to change course, to regain the capacity to react in face of the reality of evil that always challenges us. Lent is to be lived as a time of conversion, of personal and communal renewal through drawing close to God and confident adherence to the Gospel. In this way, it enables us also to look at our brothers and their needs with new eyes. For this Lent is the favorable time to be converted to love of God and of our neighbor;  a love that is able to make its own the attitude of gratuitousness and mercy of the Lord, who “became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich” (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9). By meditating on the central mysteries of the faith, the Passion, Cross and Resurrection of Christ, we will realize that the measureless gift of the Redemption was given to us by God’s gratuitous initiative.

Rendering thanks to God for the mystery of His crucified love; genuine faith, conversion and openness of heart to brothers: these are essential elements to live the Lenten season. On this journey we wish to invoke with particular trust the protection and help of the Virgin Mary: may She, the first believer in Christ, accompany us in our days of intense prayer and penance, to be able to celebrate, purified and renewed in the Spirit, the great mystery of the Easter of her Son. Thank you!

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**Speaker:**

Dear Brothers and Sisters: Today, Ash Wednesday, begins our Lenten journey of penance, prayer and conversion in preparation for the Church’s annual celebration of the saving mysteries of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection. In these days the Church asks us to ponder with joy and gratitude God’s immense love revealed in the paschal mystery and to live ever more fully the new life we have received in Baptism. This journey of spiritual renewal in the footsteps of Christ also calls us to acknowledge and respond to the growing spiritual and material poverty in our midst. Specifically, it means consciously resisting the pressure of a culture which thinks it can do without God, where parents no longer teach their children to pray, where violence, poverty and social decay are taken for granted. May this Lent, then, be a time when, as individuals and communities, we heed the words of the Gospel, reflect on the mysteries of our faith, practice acts of penance and charity, and open our hearts ever more fully to God’s grace and to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

Holy Father (in Italian):

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today’s Audience, including those from Malta, Denmark, Sweden, Indonesia, Canada and the United States. May the Lenten journey we begin today bring us to Easter with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Upon you and your families I invoke joy and peace in Christ our Redeemer!

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I give a cordial welcome to the Italian-speaking faithful. I greet the women religious nurses of USMI; the inspectors of Catholic schools, gathered around the Italian Federation of Institutes of Educational Activity; the Politrasfusi Italiani Association; the partners of AVIS of Livorno and Castelraimondo; the National Association of Alpine troops and members of ANAS. I am happy to welcome the numerous young people, in particular the Gen Tre girls of the Focolare Movement, and the students of the Fermi High School of Aversa. I exhort all to live the faith with joy, witnessing the Lord’s love for every person.

A special thought goes to young people, the sick and newlyweds. Today, Ash Wednesday, the Lenten itinerary begins. Dear young people, I hope you will live this time of grace with a genuine penitential spirit, as a return to the Father, who waits for all with open arms. Dear sick, I encourage you to offer your sufferings for the conversion of those living far from God; and I hope that you, dear newlyweds, will build your family with courage and generosity on the solid rock of divine love.