



*“Be transformed by the renewal
of your mind” (Rom. 12:2)*

My dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,

I greet you in the peace of the Lord and share with you some of my reflections as we begin the Lenten season during which we hope for the renewal of our lives in Christ and seek to deepen our Passionist commitment by keeping alive the memory of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

Every season in nature is a new time, and the change each season brings about is very obvious. In terms of our spiritual life, we are now beginning the liturgical season of Lent, leading to Easter. In general, we can say that the northern hemisphere of the globe celebrates the Lenten-Easter season during the Spring season when new buds are emerging and temperatures warming, while the southern hemisphere's celebration occurs in the Autumn season when the leaves begin to fall with temperatures cooling. The image, however, is stark; there is clearly a visible change happening.



CHANGE is what the season of Lent is all about. It is the opportunity offered us to hear deeper and follow the core message of Jesus and the Gospel: the call to **CHANGE** (*metanoia*) – renew, reform, restructure (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 4:17). The Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr in his meditation *“Simply Living the Gospel”* writes:

*“Jesus’ first recorded word in at least two Gospels, ‘metanoia’, is unfortunately translated with the moralistic, churchy word ‘repent’. The word quite literally means ‘change’ or even more precisely “Change your minds!” (Mark 1:15; Matthew 4:17). Given that, it is quite strange that the religion founded in Jesus’ name has been so resistant to change and has tended to love and protect the past and the **status quo** much more than the positive and hopeful futures that could be brought about by people agreeing to change...We have not taught a spirituality of actual change or growth...”*

As human beings, who are prone to go our own way, we are constantly in need of the **'change of mind'** to which Jesus invites us. Therefore, as we begin this new Lenten season, let us all once again accept the invitation and seize this opportunity offered us by fighting against the resistance to change which is so strong and which we so easily justify.

However, the **process of metanoia** is not easy; it is very challenging and deeply painful, as the prophet Joel proclaimed: *"Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn."* (Joel 2:13) Rather, the 'change of mind' demanded asks of us to



'let go' (surrender) of our habits, attitudes, acts and justifications which are so deeply ingrained and which we have grown used to live with comfortably, but in truth, we know are destructive toward our relationships and connectedness with God, with others, with oneself and with the natural world. Taking the direction of renewal and reform can seem too much to handle by our own efforts.

However, in faith, we can cooperate with the graces which the Lord surely grants to those who trust in Him. The opportunity is fresh, and new, and now!

"We urge you not to let your acceptance of God's grace come to nothing. For God says: 'In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.' Well, now is the real time of favour; now is the day of salvation." (2Cor. 6:1-2)

Let us not pass by the opportunity. Seize the moment!

If we are serious about responding in this joyful season when our God is close to us, encouraging us with mercy and embracing us in love, then we will make special efforts to devote time and practices to listen to the Spirit who will bring to our consciousness the specific matters in our personal and communal lives which we know we must change because they are leading us "up the garden path" to emptiness and infertility, rather than "down the narrow path" to fullness and life.

Let us make time to consider and chart a new plan for our lives by reflecting on the three Gospel virtues: *almsgiving, prayer and fasting* (Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18) which the Church puts before us each year (at the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday) as a broad backdrop by which we can examine those more personal and specific matters which the Spirit has cast light upon for our attention. As always, these three virtues must be considered from both the personal and the social-communal perspectives. Further, the fruits borne by the process of conversion must be manifested not just in *acts*, but in **actions**.

Jesus makes it quite clear when addressing his disciples about these three evangelical areas, that they are not just to perform good *acts* (make a show) which can look nice externally for everyone to see and applaud (a pretense = hypocritical act), but, rather, that they **take action** which is motivated by a loving and life-giving desire emerging out of a deep reflection and humble listening to the God within. This is what generates true internal (and external) change, because it is founded on the Word of God.

I invite us to engage in this season profitably by devoting some time daily to reflecting on the following points:

ALMSGIVING – FROM AVARICE TO GENEROSITY

- Overcoming selfish and individualistic tendencies by charitable giving and communal sharing.
- Solidarity and simplicity of lifestyle ... *“living simply so that others may simply live”*.
- Consideration of and a deeper ‘seeing’ the needs of others.
- Giving without counting the cost.
- Self-denial for the sake of giving to the poor.
- Hospitality and charity.



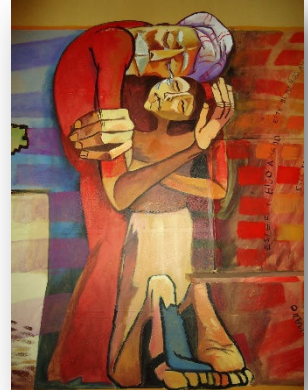
PRAYER – FROM PERFORMANCE TO ENCOUNTER

- Growing in deeper relationship and engagement with God.
- Dialogue with God rather than mere observance of duty and obligation.
- Consideration of others and inclusion of their needs.
- Practice of solitude and contemplation to see deeper.
- Celebration in thanksgiving of God's presence and love.



FASTING – FROM SELF-DENIAL TO SELF-GROWTH

- Not just giving-up, but taking-on.
- Solidarity with the suffering humanity and creation.
- Living with compassion = “to suffer with”.
- Assuming practices which assists personal growth and right relationships.
- Refraining from actions which cause harm to others and to the environment.
- Peace-making and reconciliation.



For us, Passionists, the journey of the Lenten season is a walking with, listening to and learning from Jesus in his Passion and Death, with our gaze fixed on the Resurrection hope and new life of Easter joy. We can pray: “*May the Passion of Jesus Christ be in our minds and hearts, so the Life of Jesus, too, may be in us.*”

Alma

I end with the following **action statement** from Pope Francis’ Lenten message:

“Putting the paschal mystery at the centre of our lives means feeling compassion towards the wounds of the crucified Christ present in the many innocent victims of wars, in attacks on life, from that of the unborn to that of the elderly, and various forms of violence. They are likewise present in environmental disasters, the unequal distribution of the earth’s goods, human trafficking in all its forms, and the unbridled thirst for profit, which is a form of idolatry.”


~ Fr Joachim Rego CP
Superior General