



Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,

I greet you with the hope that you have begun this Lenten season with a new found fervour. This is always a special and sacred time for us Passionists, as we are called to reflect on our charism and deepen our relationship with Jesus Crucified and Risen.

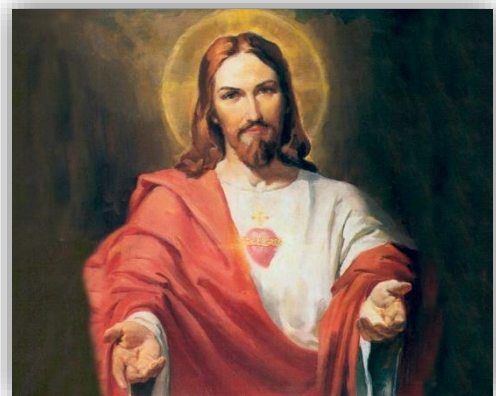
LENT is a process we undergo, a journey which we are invited to undertake with the goal of CONVERSION: *“Turn away from sin (repent) and believe in the Gospel.”* However, conversion is a grace, God’s gift in response to God’s call: *“come back to me with your whole heart...let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn” (Joel 2:12-13).* The focus is our **hearts** and any meaningful acts that will contribute to its wholeness and sincerity, thereby allowing God’s grace to bring about renewal and transformation in our lives. However, we must guard against ‘showy’ exterior acts which are performed as mere pretentious and empty rituals which Jesus condemned as hypocritical and an obstacle to the grace of conversion.



Conversion (*metanoia*) is a deep interior journey undertaken with trust in a God “*who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in faithful love, and who relents about inflicting punishment.*” (Joel 2:13). Therefore, we need not be afraid to walk this journey because “*God is love*” and “*in love there is no room for fear, but perfect love drives out fear.*” (1 John 4:16,18) We know that as human and sinful disciples of Jesus, we are constantly in need of conversion (turning back) to Christ. ***Being with*** Christ and ***obediently following*** his way is the path for an ongoing renewal of our minds and hearts.

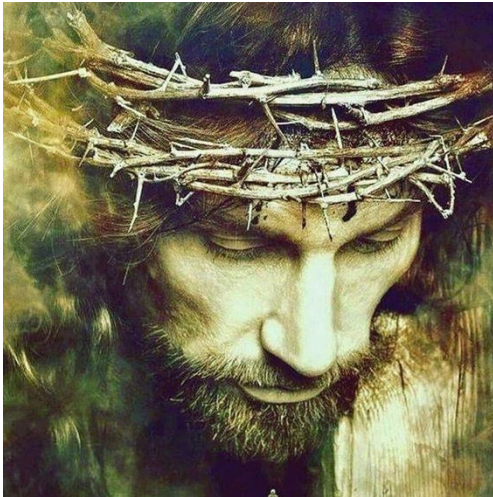
Lent is an ***opportunity***, a graced time *to listen to our hearts* in openness and sincerity, *to examine our lives* in accordance with the Gospel, and *to put into practice* what we believe the Holy Spirit is asking of us. May we not be careless and let this ***opportunity*** and gift pass by; rather, let us listen to and hear the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman whom he encountered at the water well: “*If you only knew what God is offering...*” (John 4:10). Accepting the life-giving “*living water*” that God is offering will allow us to reclaim the joy of living to the full. So, let us grasp the opportunity offered us once again this Lent and let us consciously ask for the grace of conversion, for Jesus says: “*Until now you have not asked anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and so your joy will be complete.*” (John 16:24).

God opens the door and invites us: “*come back to me with your whole heart*”. We can ask ourselves: *What is the condition of my ‘heart’ at this time?* Take the opportunity this Lent to do a heart-check. Identify the blockages which have been built up over time and which you have been unable to clear, thereby preventing you from accepting with humility and gratitude the grace of freedom being offered by God; the blockages caused by pride and self-sufficiency which steal your joy and leave you disillusioned with a false sense of security. Instead, let us cultivate the virtue of ***humility*** and adopt a disposition of ***humble listening***, both of which are necessary for conversion,



i.e. God's offer to return and drink "living water", and both of which Jesus models for us as we commit to *walking with* him in his Passion, Death and Resurrection. This is also the Church's present journey of **synodality** which requires '*kenosis*', *self-emptying*. As Sr. Nathalie Becquart (Under-secretary for the General Secretariat for the Synod) said recently at the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality: "*It's really a path of conversion and transformation that asks of us a lot of courage to speak, to listen with humility...It requires attentiveness to the movement of the Spirit of truth within.*"

Humility is not about putting oneself down and grovelling. Rather, it is about knowing the truth of oneself and living from that truth which is, that God is ALL and I am NOTHING, yet immensely loved by God. In his ministry, Jesus led many people to discover this truth which brought about their conversion



and transformation. God's love received with open hearts has the power to heal and create anew! This is the spirituality by which St. Paul of the Cross also lived his life and mission, and the message he wanted us to proclaim in and out of season: that in the humility, and humiliation, of Jesus in his Passion during his entire life, we find expressed the most profound reality of Divine Love for all.

I conclude with this reflection from the Australian Cistercian monk, Fr. Michael Casey:

Jesus saved people by becoming one with them – with us. If this involved defying expectations by sharing a meal with designated sinners, then expectations had to be set aside. No doubt Jesus enjoyed the meal and enjoyed the company. The unhappy ones are those who hold themselves aloof, who do not reach out to those who are lost but wrap themselves in their self-satisfaction – and then wonder why they are always so angry.

I wish you a blessed and fruitful Lenten journey.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Rego, C.P.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. Joachim Rego, C.P.
Superior General