



Dear Friends,

This week we celebrate Ash Wednesday - the beginning of the season of Lent, a preparation time for the Easter. Excluding Sundays, it is a season of forty days, in imitation of Jesus spending forty days in the desert. Lent is a time to put our souls before a mirror and see ourselves as we really are. Lent is an invitation to allow our sin and darkness to come to the surface so that we can deal with them and allow them be healed by the grace of Jesus. During these forty days of Lent, let us not hide from our sinfulness or prevent God from speaking to us or healing us. It is only when we admit that we are struggling with something that we can deal with it. The first stage of healing and

being forgiven is to admit imperfection and sins. If we remain in denial, we miss out on the grace of God, which is able to heal us, renew us and make us whole. The words of Jesus can be our words this Lent, ***"Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."*** (Matthew 4:4)

Since the early centuries, the Church has suggested three things for us to undertake during Lent - **prayer, fasting and almsgiving**. It is for this reason that the Gospel text for Ash Wednesday every year is Jesus' advice on prayer, fasting and almsgiving (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18).

Almsgiving, or helping the poor, brings the words of Jesus to mind, ***"Whatever you did to one of the least of these you did to me."*** (Matthew 25:45)

Fasting is another thing the Church encourages us to practice during Lent. From a spiritual point of view, fasting symbolizes our dependence on God. It expresses the fact that we put God first in our life. The Bible tells us that fasting from food must go together with avoiding violence and oppressing people (Isaiah 58:3-12). In other words, when we fast from food, it is to be accompanied by a loving and forgiving attitude towards others. Let us fast in a way that is pleasing to God. Can we make an effort to forgive those who have hurt us and not harbor resentment any longer?

Prayer should be an important part of our daily activities. We live busy lives and there is much emphasis on enjoying life, but a life without prayer is a life without the joy of the presence of God; when we pray we touch God. If we do not pray, we are not Christians at full potential; we are only walking when we could be flying.

The word "Lent" is an old English word which means "springtime." I pray that this Lent may really be a new springtime in the lives of each of us. Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving may we be spiritually renewed and thus be well prepared to celebrate Easter.

Wishing you a blessed Lent,
Fr. Krzysztof Kardzis