



# LENT

by bro FRANCESCO SCARAMUZZI OFM Cap.

Last 14 February, with the celebration of Ash Wednesday we began the season of Lent. This is a time of renewal and a looking forward to Easter, Christ's Resurrection and victory over death.

The liturgy of the Word during the five Sundays of Lent, urges us ardently from the Gospels of Mark and John to conversion. We are all called to return to the Lord with our whole heart (*cf. Joel 2, 12*). In a special way, on the first Sunday of Lent in the text where Satan tempts Jesus (*cf. Mk 1, 12-15*), we are urged to prepare our hearts to listen to the Word, so that a true conversion can bring about the joy and Spirit of Easter in us. "Temptation", "conversion" and "joy", are the three steps of this "return" to God.

All of us in fact are exposed in continuation to the temptation of making ourselves the centre of our lives; of making choices "regardless of God" or of "acting as if God did not exist" (Hugo Grotius); and of making the ways and maxims of the world the sole parameters of our success. The reality of evil, which is incarnated in the devil and the tempter of the Gospel, means separation and

estrangement from God, that comes about when we choose evil in our lives. (Devil, in Greek *dia-ballein*, in fact signifies "to separate," "to divide," "to scatter").

There in that moment when confronted with the choice of evil that estranges and renders us before God unsightly and less than human, God's love manifested and incarnated in Jesus Christ, erupts before us telling us that complete happiness cannot be found in self-seeking, in following the ways of the world, and making our own interests the centre of our lives, even to the harm of others, but in the gift of ourselves. This eruption of God's love then becomes a call to change direction, to change our way of thinking and living, to see things from another perspective: that of God.

This change, that comes about from this encounter with God's love that is offered to all, without exclusion, produces evangelical "joy", that joy that is liberated by the gift of ourselves to God and to others, and which the Gospel speaks of: "It is more blessed to give than to receive!" (*Acts 20,35*).

It is well known how diligently Saint Pio practised Lent, with his mind continuously raised to God in prayer and practising penance. We too are called to this. We too are called to make this "a beneficial time to 'prune' from ourselves falseness, worldliness, indifference," so as to turn to God and be reconciled with Him, while avoiding the three obstacles of locking the doors of our heart, being ashamed to open them and distancing ourselves from them (*Pope Francis' homily, Ash Wednesday, 10 February 2016*).

The practices of fasting, prayer and almsgiving – that are characteristic of Lent – are to show us in the end the way to God and to others. They should lead us beyond our self-interests, enable us to centre our minds always in God, and to give to others a little of ourselves and what we have. This is the only way, only by dying to ourselves do we produce fruit (*cf. Jn 12, 20-33, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent*), by centering again our lives on what brings the joy of Easter: the sacrifice of our lives for love. ♥

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