

## A Path for the Lenten Journey: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving



On February 18, we will once again enter the holy season of Lent - a sacred journey that leads us to the Feast of Feasts, the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. These forty days are a precious gift from the Church, a time set apart for the renewal of our hearts and lives. Along this journey, the Church lovingly invites us to walk with three faithful companions: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Let our prayer during this season be simple and honest, like the prayer of the tax collector in the Gospel of Luke: *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner"* (Lk. 18:13). Standing humbly before God, the tax collector did not defend himself or compare himself to others. He placed all his hope in God's mercy. His eyes were not lifted to heaven, but his heart was open. Let this be our prayer as well—spoken quietly, sincerely, and often. And the beautiful mystery we will discover is this: God's mercy is always there, waiting for us.

The second invitation of the Lenten journey is fasting. Jesus tells us, *"When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you"* (Mt. 6:17-18). Fasting is not meant to draw attention to ourselves, but to draw us closer to God.

While fasting helps us practice self-control and deepen our prayer, its truest purpose is love. From the earliest days of the Church, fasting was closely tied to care for others. In the second century, the Christian writer Hermas tells of a conversation with an angel who explained that fasting becomes meaningful when what we save is shared with the poor. When we deny ourselves something and offer that gift to someone in need, our fasting becomes an act of compassion. This is the fast the Church calls us to embrace - a fast shaped by love.

The third part of our Lenten path is almsgiving. Jesus teaches us: *"When you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you... But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you"* (Mt. 6:2-4). Our generosity is meant to be quiet and sincere, flowing from a heart that seeks to serve rather than be praised.

The Church continually reminds us to care for the poor, the widow, and the orphan. In doing so, we remember Christ's powerful words: *"Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"* (Mt. 25:40). Jesus makes himself present in every person, especially in those who are suffering or forgotten. When we give to those in need, we encounter Christ himself.

This, then, is the gentle and life-giving path the Church sets before us during Lent: prayer that humbles the heart, fasting that opens us to love, and almsgiving that reveals Christ among us. If we walk this path with sincerity, we will discover that Lent does not lead only to the Resurrection of Christ - but to a renewed and resurrected life within us.

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