

## Pope: Fasting Requires Nourishment on Word of God



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(Zenit.org).- Benedict XVI began Lent today with the reflection: "He does not really fast who does not know how to nourish himself on the Word of God."

The Pope made this affirmation at the general audience, during which he reflected on baptism and the readings from each Sunday of Lent, echoing his message for this year's Lenten liturgical season.

The Holy Father spoke of Lent as a journey: "[I]t is to accompany Jesus who goes up to Jerusalem, the place of the fulfillment of the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection; it reminds us that the Christian life is a 'journey' to undertake, which consists not so much in a law to be observed but in the very person of Christ, who we must encounter, receive and follow."

Jesus "tells us that to arrive with him to the light and the joy of resurrection, to the victory of life, of love, of the good, we must also take up our cross every day," the Pontiff continued. Citing the "Imitation of Christ," he added that "if you are his partner in sorrow, you will also be so in triumph."

### **Today**

Benedict XVI said that this journey is undertaken above all in the liturgy.

There, he said, we are placed "in Jesus' school, reflecting on the events that brought us salvation, but not as a simple commemoration, a memory of past events. In the liturgical actions, where Christ makes himself present through the power of the Holy Spirit, those salvific events become actual."

In this regard, the Pope noted how the word "today" is key: "Today God reveals his law and lets us choose today between good and evil, between life and death (cf. Deuteronomy 30:19); today 'the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel' (Mark 1:15); today Christ died on Calvary and has resurrected from the dead; he has ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; today we are given the Holy Spirit; today is the favorable time.

"To participate in the liturgy means, therefore, to submerge one's life in the mystery of Christ, in his permanent presence, to undertake a journey in which we enter into his death and resurrection to have

life."

## **5 lessons, 3 practices**

The Bishop of Rome went on to reflect about each of the readings from the five Sundays of Lent, noting how particularly during this Year A, they follow a baptismal itinerary.

"The First Sunday, called Sunday of the Temptation because it presents the temptations of Jesus in the desert, invites us to renew our definitive decision for God and to face with courage the struggle that awaits us to remain faithful to him," he said.

The Second Sunday presents Abraham and the Transfiguration: "[L]ike Abraham, father of believers, we are also invited to leave our land, to leave the securities we have built for ourselves, to again put our trust in God."

The next three Sundays show baptism in the imagery of water, light and life: We meet the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and the resurrected Lazarus.

The Pope then moved to a reflection on the traditional Lenten practices: fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

Regarding fasting, the Holy Father asserted: "He does not really fast who does not know how to nourish himself on the Word of God." And fasting, he continued, is linked to almsgiving. He cited St. Leo the Great: "Whatever a Christian does always, he must now do with greater dedication and devotion, to fulfill the apostolic norm of Lenten fasting consisting in abstinence not only from food, but above all abstinence from sins. To this obligatory and holy fast, no more useful deed can be added than almsgiving, which under the unique name of 'mercy' includes many good works."

### **Finally, the Pontiff called Lent a "privileged time for prayer."**

"The Church knows that, because of our weakness, it is very difficult to be silent and to place oneself before God, and to become aware of our condition as creatures who depend on him and sinners in need of his love," he said. "This is why Lent invites us to a more faithful and intense prayer and to a prolonged meditation on the Word of God."

The Holy Father concluded by encouraging a renewal that will bring us to "reach Easter and be able to say with St. Paul, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.'"

"A good Lenten journey to you all," he said.