

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Feb 14th 2024

“To Listen” and “Do not be afraid”

Today we enter the gracious season of Lent. The Word of God calls us to be intimately united with the Lord. This intimacy with the Lord should manifest an abundance of charity! And so, we hear: pray in private; give alms in secret; and fast with brightly anointed head. The Church encourages us to live these three spiritual attitudes in the Lenten season in exclusive union with God.

In his Lenten Message for this year, Pope Francis makes two proposals to bring in a transformation in our lives. The first proposal is “to listen” (Mt. 17:5) to the voice of Jesus. Attending daily Mass may not be a possibility for many of us. So, he urges the faithful to study the Word of God even with the help of our modern gadgets, and listen to the voice of the needy brethren.

The second proposal of the pope is “not to take refuge in a religiosity made up of extraordinary events and dramatic experiences, out of fear of facing reality and its daily struggles, its hardships and contradictions.” Listen to the voice of Jesus telling us, “Rise, and do not be afraid.”

Therefore, Lent calls on us to face struggles and pains with courage. We are called to go up with Christ to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a place of rejection, sufferings and death but it is also the place where Jesus will rise in glory. We are invited to walk with the Lord, even if it would mean to experience sufferings and death. But, we are promised of a joyous resurrection, individually and as a community.

Therefore, these days of penance are intended to help us to return to our origins—to God, to our better selves—and consequently also return to our neighbour. Often times we have tried to be our own gods, to decide for ourselves what is right or wrong, and we have ended up by making ourselves the centre of the world at the expense of ourselves, God and of neighbour. Now is the right time to return to God and to turn to the people around us. We express our brokenness and our readiness to change when, after the Gospel, we receive the ashes.

In this Lenten Season, let us commit ourselves to transform our Lenten observances into a “full, active and conscious participation” in the passion of the Lord through our attentive listening to the Word of God and through our works of charity, prayer and fasting with courage.

Bible Claret