

Lent 2010

Dearest Sisters and young women in formation,

As the holy season of Lent approaches, I write to you from immense Africa, where, together with Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan and Sr. Anna Caiazza we are conducting the fraternal visit of our communities in Eastern Africa.

We prepare ourselves to live Lent united to all the people of God, a privileged liturgical period that, as Pope Benedict XVI asserts, “urges us to put a more decisive effort into our Christian existence. Since duties, commitments, and preoccupations can cause us to become victims of habit and expose us to the risk of forgetting how extraordinary the adventure in which Jesus has involved us is, we need to begin again every day our demanding journey of evangelical living, entering into ourselves through restful pauses of the spirit.”

The great season of Lent is, therefore, a good occasion to look again spiritually at *the “parable” of our Christian existence* in which, through the passing of time, the mystery of Christ the Master, died and risen for the salvation of humanity, is renewed.

Lent, a time to return to God

At the beginning of the Lenten itinerary, the rite of the imposition of ashes with the simple yet profound gestures that accompany it offers us the opportunity to recall the fragility linked to our nature as creatures: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return”. As the Church this year directs these words to every Christian, they bring to mind the images, transmitted across the media of the entire world, of the dramatic reality of devastation caused by the earthquake that shook Haiti. Clouds of dust hung over the destruction and the ruins, and the sky itself was transformed into an immense cloud of dust, leaving on the land its burden of destruction and death for hundreds of thousands of persons.

This tragic event, too, that highlights not only the fragility of life, but also the world’s neighborly solidarity with those who suffer, has re-set the spiritual coordinates upon which our earthly existence is set and moves forward: the *primacy of God* in our lives, which by *adhering in faith to the humble and suffering Messiah*, has cast the light of hope on the history of our days.

Lent invites us to begin again the journey of conversion and interior renewal, supported by our faith; it asks us to note the personal and communitarian ways we can take to return to God, who is the starting point and destination of our earthly pilgrimage.

With depth and intensity, Father Alberione traced out in a few lines the meaning of human existence: “Coming forth from the hands of God and being called to glorify him in eternity, human persons make a “test journey”, a trial that is called life. The Father himself sent his Son as Teacher to point out, walk, and make himself the Way for humanity. At the end, therefore, human beings will be judged as to whether or not they conformed themselves to the Son of God in mind, will, and life”. (Donec Formetur 35).

The test journey, a metaphor for human life, incarnates the daily experience, in which in myriad presences and encounters, the Face of God is revealed, drawn close to, or hidden; this is *a suffering face, and at the same time the face of the Risen One*. (cf. Starting Afresh from Christ, 23)

During the time of Lent, in particular, we make an interior journey called conversion, in order to indicate the never ending road of purification, marked by the evangelical logic of the Cross, that embraces everyone's existence and is illuminated by the future resurrection. Under the Spirit's leadership, day by day we can grow and change because it is never too late to *become people conformed to Christ, a prolongation in history of the special presence of the Risen Lord* (cf, Vita Consecrata 19), like St. Paul who, captured by the love of Christ, became his instrument for the salvation of many (Phil 3:12).

Cardinal Carlo Martini reminds us that to live in a journey of continual conversion it is necessary *to confront who we are and all we do with the requirements of the primacy of God, because only the Lord is the measure of truth, of justice, and of good. We need to return to the truth in ourselves and give up using that as the measure of all things, and come to know that God alone is the only measure that does not pass away, he is the anchor who stabilizes the foundation, giving us a reason for living, loving, and dying.*

The life of Primo Maestro, "touched by the hand of Christ, whose voice penetrated his being, and held up by his grace" (VC 40), gave witness to the primacy of God and affirmed God's priority over all things. His apostolic fervor is manifested in his exhortation: "Live of God! And give God!" (Ut Perfectus IV, pp. 278). All was permeated with the same interior light that shone in the young Alberione during the "night that divided the centuries", and this became a devouring fire that lit his heart with passion for God and for humanity. "It is impossible that a soul full of the love of God" he wrote, "can keep it contained within himself. If a vessel is full and continues to receive other water, it spills over, and spills out much more abundance than it received." (Vademecum no.953)

Along the Lenten pilgrimage, which we will walk together with the Master, we too will reaffirm our commitment to renewal and our adhesion to the living and true God in the light of the Word of God, so that we can offer a communitarian and apostolic life that will be more efficacious the more it is imbued with the values of love, truth, and justice.

Then we will be truly light that illumines the world, as Fr Bartholomew Sorge SJ recently reminded us: "it does not matter if you are few, because even a thousand candles that have gone out cannot light even one candle, but one burning candle can light up thousands!"

Let us, therefore, stir up the hope that this Lent will open us to the intense joy of the Resurrection in which the Living God is always with us.

Dearest, often our thoughts and prayers fly to the people of Haiti, and I thank you for your intense participation in the prayer of February 5th, the commemoration of the birth of Maestra Thecla.

During Lent, in addition to continuing our prayers, I invite you to carry out a gesture of support and solidarity for the survivors of the earthquake, offering some contribution which you can send to the Bursar General or through the relief efforts from your own location.

I wish you a fruitful Lenten journey and ask a remembrance in your prayers for the visit to this Continent of Hope, Africa.



Sr. M. Antonietta Bruscato
Superior General