



The Holy See

HOLY MASS, BLESSING AND IMPOSITION OF THE ASHES

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Basilica of Santa Sabina

Ash Wednesday, 14 February 2018

[Multimedia]

The season of Lent is a favourable time to remedy the dissonant chords of our Christian life and to receive the ever new, joyful and hope-filled proclamation of the Lord's Passover. The Church in her maternal wisdom invites us to pay special attention to anything that could dampen or even corrode our believing heart.

We are subject to numerous temptations. Each of us knows the difficulties we have to face. And it is sad to note that, when faced with the ever-varying circumstances of our daily lives, there are voices raised that take advantage of pain and uncertainty; the only thing they aim to do is sow distrust. If the fruit of faith is charity – as Mother Teresa often used to say – then the fruit of distrust is apathy and resignation. Distrust, apathy and resignation: these are demons that deaden and paralyze the soul of a believing people.

Lent is the ideal time to unmask these and other temptations, to allow our hearts to beat once more in tune with the vibrant heart of Jesus. The whole of the Lenten season is imbued with this conviction, which we could say is echoed by three words offered to us in order to rekindle the heart of the believer: *pause*, *see* and *return*.

Pause a little, leave behind the unrest and commotion that fill the soul with bitter feelings which never get us anywhere. *Pause* from this compulsion to a fast-paced life that scatters, divides and ultimately destroys time with family, with friends, with children, with grandparents, and time as a gift... time with God.

Pause for a little while, refrain from the need to show off and be seen by all, to continually appear on the “noticeboard” that makes us forget the value of intimacy and recollection.

Pause for a little while, refrain from haughty looks, from fleeting and pejorative comments that arise from forgetting tenderness, compassion and reverence for the encounter with others, particularly those who are vulnerable, hurt and even immersed in sin and error.

Pause for a little while, refrain from the urge to want to control everything, know everything, destroy everything; this comes from overlooking gratitude for the gift of life and all the good we receive.

Pause for a little while, refrain from the deafening noise that weakens and confuses our hearing, that makes us forget the fruitful and creative power of silence.

Pause for a little while, refrain from the attitude which promotes sterile and unproductive thoughts that arise from isolation and self-pity, and that cause us to forget going out to encounter others to share their burdens and suffering.

Pause for a little while, refrain from the emptiness of everything that is instantaneous, momentary and fleeting, that deprives us of our roots, our ties, of the value of continuity and the awareness of our ongoing journey.

Pause in order to look and contemplate!

See the gestures that prevent the extinguishing of charity, that keep the flame of faith and hope alive. Look at faces alive with God’s tenderness and goodness working in our midst.

See the face of our families who continue striving, day by day, with great effort, in order to move forward in life, and who, despite many concerns and much hardship, are committed to making their homes a school of love.

See the faces of our children and young people filled with yearning for the future and hope, filled with “tomorrows” and opportunities that demand dedication and protection. Living shoots of love and life that always open up a path in the midst of our selfish and meagre calculations.

See our elderly whose faces are marked by the passage of time, faces that reveal the living memory of our people. Faces that reflect God’s wisdom at work.

See the faces of our sick people and the many who take care of them; faces which in their vulnerability and service remind us that the value of each person can never be reduced to a question of calculation or utility.

See the remorseful faces of so many who try to repair their errors and mistakes, and who from their misfortune and suffering fight to transform their situations and move forward.

See and contemplate the face of Crucified Love, who today from the cross continues to bring us hope, his hand held out to those who feel crucified, who experience in their lives the burden of failure, disappointment and heartbreak.

See and contemplate the real face of Christ crucified out of love for everyone, without exception. For everyone? Yes, for everyone. To see his face is an invitation filled with hope for this Lenten time, in order to defeat the demons of distrust, apathy and resignation. The face that invites us to cry out: "The Kingdom of God is possible!"

Pause, see and return. Return to the house of your Father. *Return* without fear to those outstretched, eager arms of your Father, who is rich in mercy (cf. *Eph 2:4*), who awaits you.

Return without fear, for this is the favourable time to come home, to the home of my Father and your Father (cf. *Jn 20:17*). It is the time for allowing one's heart to be touched... Persisting on the path of evil only gives rise to disappointment and sadness. True life is something quite distinct and our heart indeed knows this. God does not tire, nor will he tire, of holding out his hand (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 19).

Return without fear, to join in the celebration of those who are forgiven.

Return without fear, to experience the healing and reconciling tenderness of God. Let the Lord heal the wounds of sin and fulfil the prophecy made to our fathers: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (*Ezek 36: 26*).

Pause, see and return!