

An Introduction

Dear Friends,

Doesn't it seem like Advent and Christmas just ended? And yet, here we are – on the brink of another Lent. Another 40 days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Another chance to dig deeper into what these three aspects of our faith mean and how we can live them out in light of our experience of long-term service. There is a correlation between the actions of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving and the pillars of faith-based service of spirituality, community, simple living, and social justice. All of these call us to give more of ourselves than we realized we could. They call us to be uncomfortable and uneasy, but yet remain open to the possibilities this discomfort brings.

The beauty of our faith is that we can find inspiration anywhere for a deeper relationship with Christ. This encounter can occur in the acts of praying, fasting, and giving of alms. We can develop our relationship with Christ through our personal and communal prayer lives. We can learn more about the sacrifice of Christ through our fasting. We can give what we have – our time, talents, and treasure – to those who are lacking.

We are called to make a commitment to take these next forty days as a time to dig deeper into our faith and our relationship with Christ and others. This is a time for introversion, self-awareness, and growth within ourselves, much like Christ did in the desert.

For those currently in a service program, you have the freedom to take this time to grow deeper in your relationship with Christ. Even though it might seem like you are overwhelmed with your job, community life, personal relationships, and figuring out what is next, you will most likely never have a time where your life is solely dedicated on your own personal and spiritual development. Take advantage of this time to “wander in the desert” in a way. These forty days help us to grow inward so we can go outward when we experience the beauty of the resurrection on Easter Sunday.

As baptized, we are called to go forth and go outward to live as missionary disciples. Pope Francis tells us this in his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, “Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission.’” (EG 25). Once we have encountered Christ in our own way, we are called to move out from ourselves and accompany others in experiencing their own encounter with Christ. But we are not called to do this alone; we need to go through these times in a community – whether with our parish community, family community, or our service community. Then, like the apostles from the upper room at Pentecost, we are sent out to share our encounter with Christ and to meet people where they are to experience their own encounter with Christ.

These next forty days are an opportunity. A time for us to challenge ourselves to pray, fast, and give alms. It is also a time to strengthen our relationships with those around us and with Christ. Use this reflection guide as a starting off point for your Lenten journey. Take to heart the words written (and spoken) by the authors. Let them help you to dig deeper this Lent and enjoy the beauty of the resurrection at Easter.

Sincerely,

Monica Thom Konschnik

Catholic Apostolate Center, Assistant Director of Administration
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