

**PRESS CONFERENCE FOR THE PRESENTATION
OF THE MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FOR LENT 2022**

“Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all” (*Gal 6: 9-10*)

(Press Office, Thursday, February 24, 2022)

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The Message that Pope Francis is addressing to the entire Church for this year's Season of Lent, which starts with the celebration of Ash Wednesday on March 2, 2022, begins with a quote from the letter to the Galatians: “*Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all*” (*Gal 6:9-10*).

The text offers a reflection on every single phrase of the sacred scripture, with quotes from the Magisterium - in particular the Encyclicals “*Spe salvi*” and “*Fratelli tutti*” and the Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” – along with a view of the current state in history.

Lent is a time for renewed conversion and for humbly receiving the Word that “renews all things,” as it prepares us to authentically experience the Paschal Mystery. In order for this time of grace to be lived to the full, the Pope presents us with a contribution grounded in the Word of God.

I will try to briefly outline the contents of the Message, while taking advantage of this presentation to the press to invite you to read the text in its entirety and to make it a reason for constant reflection during the time of grace that we are about to begin. In particular, the Message insists on the metaphor of “sowing and reaping”, on the encouragement to not grow weary in doing good, and on the patience we need while waiting for the fruits to ripen.

1. The image of sowing and reaping is often used in Sacred Scripture. The Pope emphasizes it in the context of God and the believer. It is God who sows his Word, the seeds of grace, the desire for goodness and holiness. But believers are also called to sow for themselves, for others and for the world they live in. Lent is presented as a propitious time to welcome God's sowing, especially through listening to and meditating on his Word. Embracing the invitation to conversion and activating processes of change to turn away from evil and to clothe ourselves of Christ Jesus, involves welcoming the seed of the Word, which is always new and effective. But Lent is also a time of commitment for every believer to practice the art of sowing, knowing that no seed of good will ever go to waste. The renewing force of Easter must spur everyone to sow good, justice, goodness, charity, in order to achieve fully renewed relationships. In this regard, says the Pope: “*Sowing goodness for the benefit of others frees us from narrow self-interest, infuses our actions with gratuitousness, and makes us part of the magnificent horizon of God’s benevolent plan*”.

Sowing - the sowing that God accomplishes in our hearts and the sowing that we must also be committed to - immediately brings to mind the harvest. Lent presents itself as a time of grace in which we can catch a glimpse of the fruits to be harvested. The death and resurrection of Christ made

possible the Apostle's statement: "*So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come*" (2 Cor 5:17). Christ's resurrection is the strength that keeps us hopeful and committed to sowing, even when the fruits of the seed sown in the ground are not yet visible.

2. The second passage of the Message for Lent is grafted onto this last point. When history presents us with so many tragic examples of crises and failures, we may be tempted to become discouraged and throw in the towel. The great hope that we receive from Easter should encourage us not to tire of doing good to all. The desire to keep on walking, fixing our gaze on the One who can do everything, must be stronger than any weariness or disappointment we may experience. In his Message, the Holy Father identifies three areas of Christian life where one can concretely apply the exhortation "not to grow tired". *Let us not grow tired of praying*, because no one is saved without God, and it is precisely in prayer that one finds the strength to fight and overcome trials. *Let us not grow tired of uprooting evil from our lives*. During Lent, through fasting and by valuing the sacrament of reconciliation more, we can exercise in fighting against everything that can harm us and others. And finally, *let us not grow tired of doing good in active charity towards our neighbors*. Lent is a favorable time to take care of others, to look upon those in need, to come to the aid of those who cannot cope and to lift up the poor and the marginalized.

3. In the last passage, the Holy Father insists on the invitation to be patient and to take one step at a time, like the wise farmer mentioned in the Scripture. Lent is, in some way, the image and mirror of a Christian's entire life. As such, it constitutes a time and place of training and preparation, like a gym. Amid every setback or difficulty that can cause us to become discouraged, Lent reminds us that we can always start over. With the help of God's mercy, we can always get back up and resume following the Master and reach the Cross and Resurrection with Him. The reference to the Virgin Mary closes the Message; We ask Her for patience, so that this year's Lent may "bring forth fruits of eternal salvation".

"Let us not grow tired of doing good". I think that the Holy Father is asking us to really reflect upon this exhortation, and indeed it does take on a special meaning in light of the current world events. The health, economic and social crisis caused by the pandemic, the winds of war sweeping through different parts of the world, the scandal of hunger in various areas of the planet, the inequalities exacerbated by the lack of work or by the exploitation of the most vulnerable, are all realities that are challenging us as individuals and as the Catholic Church. What can we do? The Pope's Message offers a path for commitment and responsibility. Each one of us is called to do good, to sow the seeds of justice and charity, to pursue paths of human promotion, to work untiringly so that everyone's dignity is respected. This Lent is the time that the Lord has given us; it is the occasion that He offers us, to do good and to bring the light of the Risen Lord to the world.

Card. Francesco Montenegro