

**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)

**Presentation by di Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A.
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In the sometimes slow, sometimes hectic flow of our days, the time of Lent is offered to us as a time of opportunity to redirect our path in the right direction, that of loving God and neighbor, which is what defines us as Christians. It is the first and greatest commandment that Jesus acknowledged as the beating heart of the true Israel. This path requires perseverance and a great deal of patience, given the disappointments, failures, and the temptation to withdraw into ourselves. Pope Francis in his Message therefore invites us to not tire of doing good and doing good to all. The quote from St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, which introduces the Message, reminds us of how challenging this invitation is, yet how rich in promise: "For if we do not give up, in due time we will reap".

In line with the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* and the entire Magisterium of Pope Francis ever since his first trip to Lampedusa, St. Paul's "let us do good to all" implies that no one is excluded. We are invited to inhabit the common home as a common family. The Holy Father encourages us to begin Lent by interiorizing ever more deeply what it means to look at those we encounter with the eyes of Christ and to recognize in their gazes the eyes of Christ. Eliminating what is superfluous, simplifying our lives and taking the call to conversion seriously means, for the Church at this particular moment in history, expressing more distinctly in our lives and in our relationships that love which flows from the intimate life of God, that love which unites the Father and the Son to the Holy Spirit. It is not in fact a political opinion, but the typical desire of those who are with God "that life's truth and beauty may be found not so much in possessing as in giving, not so much in accumulating as in sowing and sharing goodness" (*LM 1*).

Pope Francis dwells on the image of sowing and farming evoked by St. Paul, suggesting that we ask ourselves what times we are living in. Winds of war, after decades of reckless rearmament, with increasing arms expenditure, and a pandemic that has claimed many lives, exacerbated inequalities, highlighted what is not working in our economic and social systems, and forced us to ask new questions... cannot make us lose hope. God believes in the Earth and cares for it in the same way that a farmer does not abandon his land. What time is this, in God's field? In a meeting with the Vatican Covid-19 Commission, Pope Francis invited us to be that fertile soil that creates the conditions for the seeds to grow. He asked us to prepare the future so that it can be different from the present. And we know that only those who are moved by hope can set to work.

Our God does not know separateness and does not like to be alone. Lent is not a real "Christian time" if it leads us to withdraw from the world: the desert of fasting and temptation must be inhabited by the perseverance and faith of those who look at the stones and see the harvest. Perhaps we see the impossible. But Lent is a return to that God for whom nothing is

impossible. The Message concludes, as is tradition, with a reference to the Virgin Mary. In her - writes Pope Francis, insisting on the guiding image of the Message - the Son has blossomed. In a world that has been made barren by so many reckless power games, the Church recognizes in the Virgin Mary the fruitfulness that the journey of conversion can bestow upon all her sons and daughters. We have faith in the sprouting buds!