

Presentation

Pope Francis's Message for Lent 2024

Card. Michael Czerny S.J.

Prefect, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

Thank you, journalists, for your valuable work in receiving, contextualising and communicating the 2024 Message. Thank you, speakers, for bringing your wisdom to help everyone receive it in all its power. And of course, thank you, Holy Father, for giving us such an inspiring reflection at the beginning of Lent.

From the very first lines, the message emphasizes freedom, a message of freedom and for freedom. At a time when many, too many, huge difficulties weigh everyone down, the Gospel opens up a path in the desert and announces that our enslavement is already over and truly ended. Indeed, the exodus journey is necessarily long, not only to reach the Promised Land, but above all to choose genuine freedom. For the freedom offered must be desired and embraced. Not even God can do this for us.

When we speak of the integral human development that the Church wants to serve, we think of the 'life in abundance' that Jesus came to bring (John 10:10). Lent brings to light the many personal and social obstacles that stand in the way, before such life in abundance, promoted by the Church, can be realized among peoples. The Pope's message for this year's Lent addresses the journeys of individuals, Churches and peoples – first, journeys in the desert and, then, journeys of faith towards the possibility of hope. To hope means both to trust in God and to look forward in history. To hope allows the Spirit to overcome fears and obstacles. One becomes willing to commit oneself actively, even willing to pay the price personally, so that the Kingdom of God may come to many.

Pope Francis does not lack concreteness. After recalling "those moments when we feel hopeless, wandering through life like a desert and lacking a promised land as our destination," the Pope observes: "Today too, the cry of so many of our oppressed brothers and sisters rises to heaven. Let us ask ourselves: Do we hear that cry? Does it trouble us? Does it move us?"

Questions like these may be an unusual introduction to Lent. Traditionally, Lent is a time to review our lives and to individually face the need for personal conversion.

However, fraternity is surely an excellent horizon against which to question ourselves and our vocation as believers, as citizens. Where are we on the journey with so many siblings at home and worldwide who cry out and ask us to walk with them?

Pope Francis's message reminds us that Pharaoh's domination is not only external but also interior. Our thoughts and hearts can still easily fall under his power. It is "a rule that makes us weary and indifferent. A model of growth that divides and robs us of a future. Earth, air and water are polluted, but so are our souls. True, Baptism has begun our process of liberation, yet there remains in us an inexplicable longing for slavery. A kind of attraction to the security of familiar things, to the detriment of our freedom."

Here are the main themes of the encyclicals *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti*. Here we see the pastoral paradigms of integral ecology, fraternity and social friendship reshaping evangelisation, not because the Gospel changes, but because it is this very broken world that must receive the Good News, in the midst of "a third world war fought piecemeal".

Life and faith are intimately united. By embracing the gift of Lent, every Christian community can accompany its members in facing the challenges of our time. For, believe it or not, the hoped-for changes in the world begin with change in me and in you. While already on the way, we must choose to keep on going and go further. This is Pope Francis's Lenten message.