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**MESSAGE FOR LENT 2020**

***Introduction:***

The Pope's *Message* for Lent 2020 bears the title: "*We implore you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God*" (2Cor 5:20); and it is an entreaty (invitation) to overcome *estrangement from God* with *conversion: a return to God*. "*Conversion*" alone and unqualified can express a person's return to God; but it can also mean God's return to his people, after the people's sinfulness has, as it were, driven away God. This is the sense of the prayer in Ps. 80 after Ezek 10-11, (cf.43:4). But with the coming of Christ to share the nature of the human person to its deepest and ultimate detail, namely death and burial, his resurrection and his ascension into the glory of heaven so bind God with humanity that God can no more be said to have separated from the human person. It is now only the human person who can estrange himself/herself from God. Wherefore, Paul's entreaty in the *Lenten Message* to be "*reconciled to God*", can now only mean the conversion and the return of the human person to God.

***About the Lenten Message:***

Pope Francis' *Lenten Message* makes its point clearly already in the first paragraph. It is a call:

- a) to prepare to celebrate the *Mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus* with renewed hearts
- b) to return continually to the *mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus* in mind and heart for the growth of its spiritual power within us.
- c) to respond freely to the spiritual power of *Jesus' death and resurrection*.

For Pope Francis, then, *to prepare to celebrate Easter with renewed hearts, to return continually, thereafter, in mind and heart to the sense of Easter for spiritual power within us, and to respond freely to Easter's offer of spiritual power: is conversion*. And it is rooted in the acceptance of God's love which is revealed in Christ, and which "*invites to a relationship of openness and fruitful dialogue with God and with other persons* (Christus vivit, 117)

For Pope Francis, *a relationship of openness and fruitful dialogue with God* takes place in prayer: when we contemplate Jesus crucified and feel compassion for him, and along with him, the very many people and situations of suffering in the world; and commend them all to God's mercy.

But another *relationship of openness and fruitful dialogue with people* also take place when we are compassionate to people and show them mercy again and again. For the recognition of our own need for God's love and mercy (*ad essere misericordiat*) needs to dispose us to be merciful

and compassionate to others, tolerating shortcomings and readiness to forgive. And this is very urgent!

The annual statistics of this country for 2019, published at the beginning of this year, showed, not only a woeful decline of birth. It also showed sadly that 33% of people in this land live alone, mostly out of broken relationships and the subsequent preference for autonomy and freedom.

But, the human being is not an individual. He/she is a *person*, a *relational being*. He/she is created to *coexist in the relationship of a family, community, society* etc, as equals in dignity and to pursue their *common good*. Relationships and dignity are what distinguish us as human beings, and no one else and nothing else in heaven or on earth is so constituted. As persons, created with inalienable dignity, we exist in relationship with others and, outside of relationship, less than human is what unfortunately we happen to be. This characteristic of the person, as relational being, underlies not only the principle of *solidarity* and of *subsidiarity*. Most importantly, it disposes us to respect the dignity and rights of every person, and enable us to embrace weak characters, the poor, the sick, the disfigured and the homeless: people who are usually spurned.<sup>1</sup> and considered poor for relations.

The Pope's *Message for Lent* reminds us of the bondage of sin we live under, and how dehumanizing sin makes our lives and relationships. Allowing ourselves to be reconciled to God and living under his gaze and in the spiritual power of the death and resurrection of Christ are not only pious religious practices; they heal our persons, as human and social beings. They heal our relationships, making our lives meaningful!

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<sup>1</sup> *Compendium*, § 105 ff., *Vocation of the Business Leader*, Nov.2018, §32 ff.