



22. February 2023

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 1: "The Call to Conversion"

Today begins the 40-day itinerary, which calls us to prepare ourselves for the celebration of the greatest feast in the Church: the victorious Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Filled with joy we will exclaim: "*Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?*" (1 Cor 15:55) The Lord is risen from the dead!

It is very important to assimilate the grace of this liturgical season, so that it becomes a real journey towards Easter. Let us call it the "holy journey of Lent".

Along this path, I will draw on the Lenten Bible readings prescribed by the lectionary of the Traditional Mass and those of the Novus Ordo, as well as other spiritual literature. Those who prefer to follow the usual rhythm of the daily meditations, listening to an explanation of the reading or the gospel of the day, will always find the corresponding links at the end of the text.

Forty days is quite a long time. If we use each day consciously, it will become a stepping stone to reach the great goal on this journey.

The same is true on our life's journey. We are on a constant pilgrimage towards our goal: eternal communion with God. Each day is given to us as an opportunity to prepare ourselves for eternity; each day is important and constitutes a part of the journey, on which we can prove our faithfulness in serving God and mankind.

Forty years the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness until they could enter the Promised Land. Forty days Jesus withdrew into the desert to pray and fast before beginning his public ministry.

At the beginning of this holy season, the liturgy of the Church reminds us of our condition as creatures: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return". It calls us to penance and fasting.

This is the great theme of today's reading, taken from the Prophet Joel (Joel 2:12-18): true conversion to God. Man often goes astray and does not really know the love of God. However, he must come to know Him, turn away from his sins and let God set him free.

Conversion to God is a central theme in our life: both the "first conversion", by which we come out of the state of sin and separation from God to start living in His grace, and also the "second conversion" that all those who have already experienced the first conversion are called to strive for, deepening it every day.

Let us keep in mind what conversion means: it is God's invitation to live in full union with Him. The Lord wants nothing more than to fill us with His love, and He helps us to put aside everything that hinders us from receiving it. Conversion is therefore a gracious call to true life. Thus, we can mourn our sins, while confidently looking to the One who is pleased to forgive us our sins.

Perhaps we sometimes associate the call to conversion and penance with a certain fear, as if something will be taken away from us. In fact, something is indeed to be taken away from us, or rather we ourselves are to give it up: all that hinders our journey with God, that which stands in our way, that which binds us, that which weighs us down, that which dulls our joy and hinders our journey. We are called to overcome our selfishness and self-centredness even in its subtlest manifestations, and to become free people in God.

Is this a reason to be afraid of Lent, as if a kind of grey veil covers these forty days and does not pass until Easter? Of course not!

Certainly, the call to conversion is a serious matter, and not a matter of frivolity and levity, but seriousness and joy are by no means incompatible! Fasting is also a grace, intended to diminish our selfishness and open our hearts to the needs of the poor.

Today, on the first day of this holy Lenten journey, let us keep the following in mind: God invites us to deepen our faith, to increase our hope and to kindle our charity, turning it into a bright and warm light in this world that needs it so much. Everything that helps us to love God and mankind more will be welcome on this journey!

In this sense, the prayer of St. Nicholas of Flüe will also accompany us along this path:

“My Lord and my God, take from me everything that distances me from You.

My Lord and my God, give me everything that brings me closer to You.

My Lord and my God, detach me from myself to give my all to You. Amen.”

Meditation on the first reading of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/ash-wednesday-holy-fasting/>