

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we enter this holy season of Lent, we are called to accompany Jesus into the desert for 40 days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. In this Sunday's Gospel of Matthew, we reflect on Christ's victory over temptation, inviting us to renew our baptismal promises, repent from sin, and strengthen our dependence on God, rather than worldly comforts.

This season of Lent is often described by St. Francis of Assisi as a time to "do penance, performing worthy fruits of penance". For Francis, this was not simply about giving up luxuries, but about a profound interior conversion—a returning to the heart of the Gospel and a renewal of our love for the "Poor Crucified One". Often, we view temptation and the "desert" as negative experiences. However, St. Francis teaches us to see the wilderness as a place of grace. It is a place of stripping away the unnecessary, allowing us to see more clearly our dependence on God. Francis himself would withdraw to hermitages during Lent to "step apart" from his daily duties to know the will of the Lord better.

The ashes received this past Wednesday mark our mortality and our desire to turn back to God. Like Jesus, we must take this time to withdraw from the noise of daily life and enter into a deeper, more intentional relationship with our Creator. Our efforts should focus on:

**Prayer:** I encourage you to increase your prayer life, perhaps by attending daily Mass or spending time in Eucharistic Adoration and Confession.

**Fasting:** Let our fasting from food and other distractions remind us that we rely on God above all.

**Almsgiving:** Let us reach out to those in need, offering our time and resources as an act of charity.

Let us not be afraid of the temptations that arise, nor discouraged by our failures. As Jesus showed us, victory is found in resisting temptation by relying on the Word of God. May this Lent be a true "springtime" for our souls. Let us follow the invitation of St. Francis to live with hearts filled with gratitude, embracing the cross so that we may fully celebrate the joy of the Resurrection.

Fr. Luke