



*Turn away from sin
and be faithful
to the Gospel.*

+ Rome, February 19, 2010

Dear Sisters,

Lent began some days ago. The priest placed the cross with ashes on our foreheads, saying the words: "Remember, man, you are dust and to dust you will return." or: "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel." Believe in the Gospel, in the Good News! Give witness to it through your life! That is the challenge right at the beginning of Lent. The Gospel of Ash Wednesday leads us exactly in that direction: "When you fast, you are not to look glum... When you fast, see to it that you groom your hair and wash your face. In that way no one can see you are fasting." (Mt 6, 16ff) That gave me the idea to look at the Lenten Season under the aspect of joy.

Lent – a time of joy? Do we not see the 40 days rather as an unpleasant interruption of our "normal" life, as a time of giving up what we usually like to do? The liturgical texts however do not speak much about giving up something. On the contrary, joy is celebrated, joy about the fact that God so loved us that he gave his only Son, so that we might have eternal life. (Cf. John 3:16) The first Preface for the Lenten Season says: "Each year you give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed." Abstinence is not the focus of attention, nor is a self-centered giving up. The point is rather to look into our inner being and to discover anew God's face: in his Word, in the Eucharist, in our neighbor, in the reality of daily life, in his creation.

For St. Benedict fasting, above all else, needs the basic attitude of longing and joy. Fasting and abstinence do not exclude joy, on the contrary, they are mutually dependent. Self-denial is part of life, it frees us from addictions, makes room for what is good for us, gives joy. Lent gives us a period of time for self-criticism in order to examine what is limiting our outlook. In this way these weeks can really become a time of discovery and joy. True fasting contributes to the appreciation of apparently ordinary and self-evident matters and helps us to recognize what really counts: love of God and love of neighbor. Fasting is not a

rite, imposed by God or the Church, but it is a gift of God to us in order to discover anew the source of life which sometimes is drying up during the year or is getting buried by the “garbage” of consumption.

“Be faithful to the Gospel,” to the Good News. Let us deliberately take that into the coming weeks. Let us give to the Lenten Season the mark of joy, a joy which will be experienced when we go with Jesus “up to Jerusalem.” (Cf. Mt 20:18). This could be at the same time a good preparation for the 25th anniversary of Mother Pauline’s Beatification which we will commemorate on April 14. We know how much Mother Pauline wanted the Sisters to be distinguished by “youthful joyousness.” (See letter to Vicar General Boekamp, Summer 1849) “The spirit of joy and cheerfulness cannot be sufficiently recommended to the Sisters,” so we read in the First Draft of 1849. How often she encourages the Sisters “to be the joy of the house.” She herself asks the Lord time and again for joy, so that she can serve the Lord “with an undivided, joyful heart.” She is pleased when she finds joyful communities. “A cheerful atmosphere prevails in this country,” she writes on July 11, 1877 to George, “and we have to take it into consideration. This is so much easier for me since I am similarly inclined, you know.” When we keep in mind that Mother Pauline wrote this to her brother when in exile then we might sense that it was not a superficial joy, but a basic habit which also withstood the hard blows of the Kulturkampf.

Joy and love belong together. When we experience that we are loved by God – and when is this love shown to us more clearly than during Lent – then we have all reason to be glad. “As the Father loves me, so I also love you... I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete.” (John 15:9.11)

Lord, you are the great gardener of life!
Plant a smile into our hearts -
and the world will become brighter and friendlier.
Lord, you are the great gardener of life!
Plant a smile into our hearts,
that brings reconciliation and peace.
Lord, you are the great gardener of life!
Plant a smile into our hearts,
that we may pass it on and inspire others
and so in some way change the world.

Unknown Author

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Information:

- I want to thank you sincerely for all the cards, letters, e-mails, faxes which you sent for Christmas. Although some mail arrived only after Christmas I know that your prayers were here in time. Thank you for all the signs of unity.
- From February 22-27 the coordinators of our associates will meet in Rome. For the first time one representative of our associates from each Province/Delegation/Unit will participate in the meeting. On March 1, I will go with the group to Paderborn, where we will continue our discussions until March 6, but mainly we will follow Mother Pauline's footsteps. You can imagine that the group is looking forward to all these encounters. I myself will return to Rome on March 8. Please include this meeting in your prayers, dear Sisters.
- From March 24-30 the Provincial Superiors will meet with the General Leadership in Rome. This time the main task is the evaluation of your answers to the questions with regard to the reorientation of our Congregation on the various levels. Your answers will become the basis for the next step in the process of reconfiguration. We do not know what the next step will look like. It is only Important that we go forward. We do this with the hope and confidence that we do not go alone. "Let us go forward in hope!...We need discerning eyes to see that Jesus is at work even today.....and, above all, we need a generous heart to become the instruments of his work" (Novo Millennio Ineunte, # 58) Also for this gathering I trust in your accompanying prayer.

To all of you, dear Sisters, a blessed Lent, filled with deep joy. In gratitude

I am your

Sr. Adalberta