



Simla Chandigarh Diocese

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Dear Fathers, Sisters, and Brothers

It is a grim world that we are in. Because there is an explosion of conflicts in some countries, alongside the growing gulf between nations. There is a crisis in ecology-pollution in the environment, possibilities of a dangerous use of new technologies like artificial intelligence, alongside the inability to maintain peace and security, and rising nationalism sometimes bordering on racial intolerance thus our making our lives more toxic and divisive. These forces are pushing us towards a dark world – (to dust) a world without empathy, love, understanding and the art of listening. Do we not sometimes feel that our friends are becoming strangers and even authentic communication is becoming increasingly difficult amongst members, and in our families too. Love seems to have become a bad word: hatred or anger is the new normal, and humility is seen to be a manifestation of weakness amid the glorification of feverish and selfish hostility. We are in India preparing for the general elections 2024. In fact, 40% of the world's population, it is said will be casting their vote in their own respective countries and this will surely bring in some changes for better or worse

Hence in this season of Lent which, begins this year on Ash Wednesday 14th February, Pope Francis has said: "Lent is the time to free ourselves from the illusion of chasing after dust" and for rediscovering that "we are created for God, not for the world: not for earthly deceit; for the freedom of the children of God, not for slavery to things. Earthly realities, Pope Francis said, "fade away like dust in the wind. Possessions are temporary, power passes, success wanes". We need to ask ourselves: where do I stand? Do I live for fire or for Ash? The mark of ash we receive on Ash Wednesday is a sign that helps us find our direction: "it is a reminder that of the many things occupying our thoughts, which we chase after and worry about every day, nothing will remain. No matter how hard we work, we will take no wealth with us from this life".

Lent is a God given opportunity, "an acceptable time, "a stirring call to repentance and a reminder of our mortality. This season is an invitation for us, to cling less to the dust and more to the Father who wants us to give us "the Joy of our salvation". In the words of the Prophet Joel to: 12-18: "return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping and moaning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment." Let us turn to the Father and asking for the healing and strength we need this Lent and like in any truly loving relationship; it demands purity of heart and a willingness to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the other.

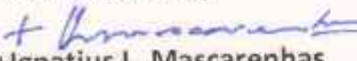
And so, we pray:

- That this season of Lent will be a time of greater prayer and fervent devotion for us and for all the church.
- That these days of Lent will be marked by earnest efforts at peace making in families, communities, throughout the world.
- That we will be generous in our arms giving this Lent, and attentive to the poor in our communities.
- That, through the increased devotion to the Holy Eucharist, God will repair all the broken relationships in our life and make us must, gentle, and forgiving.
- That this Lent we will be faithful to fasting and all the ways the Lord's sanctifies us.

May the Lord bless you and reveal to you the depths of his love. And may we grow to love him more each day.
This Circular is to be read out or its contents to be explained in Hindi or Punjabi in all Churches on Ash Wednesday or 1st Sunday of Lent.

Given on 7th February the Feast of St Gonsalo Gracia

Let us keep each other in our prayer!
In Christ our life,


+ Ignatius L. Mascarenhas
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