

Pope Francis: Message for Lent 2025: "Walking Together in Hope"

Dear brothers and sisters,

We begin our annual pilgrimage of Lent in faith and hope with the penitential rite of the imposition of ashes. The Church, our mother and teacher, invites us to open our hearts to God's grace, so that we can celebrate with great joy the paschal victory of Christ the Lord over sin and death, which led Saint Paul to exclaim: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:54-55). Indeed, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the heart of our faith and the pledge of our hope in the Father's great promise, already fulfilled in his beloved Son: life eternal (cf. Jn 10:28; 17:3).^[1]

This Lent, as we share in the grace of the Jubilee Year, I would like to propose a few reflections on what it means to *journey together in hope*, and on the summons to conversion that God in his mercy addresses to all of us, as individuals and as a community.

First of all *to journey*. The Jubilee motto, "Pilgrims of Hope", evokes the lengthy journey of the people of Israel to the Promised Land, as recounted in the Book of Exodus. This arduous path from slavery to freedom was willed and guided by the Lord, who loves his people and remains ever faithful to them. It is hard to think of the biblical exodus without also thinking of those of our brothers and sisters who in our own day are fleeing situations of misery and violence in search of a better life for themselves and their loved ones. A first call to conversion thus comes from the realization that all of us are pilgrims in this life; each of us is invited to stop and ask how our lives reflect this fact. Am I really on a journey, or am I standing still, not moving, either immobilized by fear and hopelessness or reluctant to move out of my comfort zone? Am I seeking ways to leave behind the occasions of sin and situations that degrade my dignity? It would be a good Lenten exercise for us to compare our daily life with that of some migrant or foreigner, to learn how to sympathize with their experiences and in this way discover what God is asking of us so that we can better advance on our journey to the house of the Father. This would be a good "examination of conscience" for all of us wayfarers.

Second, *to journey together*. The Church is called to walk together, to be synodal^[2] Christians are called to walk at the side of others, and never as lone travelers. The Holy Spirit impels us not to remain self-absorbed, but to leave ourselves behind and keep walking towards God and our brothers and sisters.^[3] Journeying together means consolidating the unity grounded in our common dignity as children of God (cf. Ga 3:26-28). It means walking side-by-side, without shoving or stepping on others, without envy or hypocrisy, without letting anyone be left behind or excluded. Let us all walk in the same direction, tending towards the same goal, attentive to one another in love and patience.

This Lent, God is asking us to examine whether in our lives, in our families, in the places where we work and spend our time, we are capable of walking together with others, listening to them, resisting the temptation to become self-absorbed and to think only of our own needs. Let us ask ourselves in the presence of the Lord whether, as bishops, priests, consecrated persons and laity in the service of the Kingdom of God, we cooperate with others. Whether we show ourselves welcoming, with concrete gestures, to those both near and far. Whether we make others feel a part of the community or keep them at a distance.^[4] This, then, is a second call to conversion: a summons to synodality.

Third, let us journey together *in hope*, for we have been given a promise. May *the hope that does not disappoint* (cf. *Rom5:5*), the central message of the Jubilee,^[5] be the focus of our Lenten journey towards the victory of Easter. As Pope Benedict XVI taught us in the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, "the human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: 'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (*Rom8:38-39*)".^[6] Christ, my hope, has risen!^[7] He lives and reigns in glory. Death has been transformed into triumph, and the faith and great hope of Christians rests in this: the resurrection of Christ!

This, then, is the third call to conversion: a call to hope, to trust in God and his great promise of eternal life. Let us ask ourselves: Am I convinced that the Lord forgives my sins? Or do I act as if I can save myself? Do I long for salvation and call upon God's help to attain it? Do I concretely experience the hope that enables me to interpret the events of history and inspires in me a commitment to justice and fraternity, to care for our common home and in such a way that no one feels excluded?

Sisters and brothers, thanks to God's love in Jesus Christ, we are sustained in the hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rom5:5*). Hope is the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul".^[8] It moves the Church to pray for "everyone to be saved" (*1 Tim2:4*) and to look forward to her being united with Christ, her bridegroom, in the glory of heaven. This was the prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila: "Hope, O my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly, even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain, and turns a very short time into a long one" (*The Exclamations of the Soul to God*, 15:3).^[9]

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope, intercede for us and accompany us on our Lenten journey.

+ FRANCIS



Lenten Practices

The traditional obligations of Lent are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These practices are meant to help people grow closer to God and prepare for Easter.

Fasting

- Fasting is a form of penance and spiritual discipline
- Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59 are required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday
- Fasting involves eating one full meal and two smaller meals that don't add up to a full meal

Abstinence

- Abstinence means not eating meat or fowl
- Catholics who are at least 14 years old are required to abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent
- Fish is permitted during Lent

Almsgiving

- Almsgiving is a way to share God's gifts with the poor
- People can give money, time, or talents to help those in need
-

Other practices during Lent include:

- Reading Sacred Scripture
- Avoiding alcohol, sweets, and desserts
- Avoiding fast foods made from chicken and beef
- Studying the Bible
- Meeting with other Christians
- Reflecting on Jesus' life

