

## Rediscover Christ

My dear friends in Christ,

At the beginning of Lent, Pope Francis urged all the faithful to use the Lenten season as a time to rediscover the direction of our life. Here are some excerpts of the words of our Holy Father.

“Blow the trumpet [...] sanctify a fast” (Joel 2:15), says the prophet in the first reading. Lent opens with a piercing sound, that of a trumpet that does not please the ears, but instead proclaims a fast. It is a loud sound that seeks to slow down our life, which is so fast-paced, yet often directionless. It is a summons to stop, to focus on what is essential, to fast from the unnecessary things that distract us. It is a wake-up call for the soul.

This wake-up call is accompanied by the message that the Lord proclaims through the lips of the prophet, a short and heartfelt message: “Return to me” (v 12). To return. If we must return, it means that we have wandered off. Lent is the time to rediscover the direction of our lives. Because in life’s journey, as in every journey, what really matters is not to lose sight of the goal. If what interests us as we travel, however, is looking at the scenery or stopping to eat, we will not get far. We should ask ourselves: On the journey of life, do I seek the way forward? Or am I satisfied with living in the moment and thinking only of feeling good, solving some problems and having fun? What is the path? Is it the search for health, which many today say comes first but which eventually passes? Could it be possessions and wellbeing? But we are not in the world for this. Return to me, says the Lord. To me. **The Lord** is the goal of our journey in this world. The direction must lead to him.

Jesus said: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt 6:21). Our heart always points in some direction: it is like a compass seeking its bearings. We can also compare it to a magnet: it needs to attach itself to something. But if it only attaches itself to earthly things, sooner or later it becomes a slave to them: things to be used become things we serve. Outward appearance, money, a career or hobby: if we live for them, they will become idols that enslave us, sirens that charm us and then cast us adrift. Whereas if our heart is attached to what does not pass away, we rediscover ourselves and are set free. Lent is a time of grace that liberates the heart from vanity. It is a time of healing from addictions that seduce us. It is a time to fix our gaze on what abides. Where can we fix our gaze, then, throughout this Lenten journey? Upon the Crucified one. Jesus on the cross is life’s compass, which directs us to heaven. The poverty of the wood, the silence of the Lord, his loving self-emptying show us the necessity of a simpler life, free from anxiety about things. From the cross, Jesus teaches us the great courage involved in renunciation. We will never move forward if we are heavily weighed down. We need to free ourselves from the clutches of consumerism and the snares of selfishness, from always wanting more, from never being satisfied, and from a heart closed to the needs of the poor. Jesus on the wood of the cross burns with love and calls us to a life that is passionate for him, which is not lost amid the ashes of the world; to a life that burns with charity and is not extinguished in mediocrity. Is it difficult to live as he asks? Yes, but it leads us to our goal. Lent shows us this. It begins with the ashes, but eventually leads us to the fire of Easter night; to the discovery that, in the tomb, the body of Jesus does not turn to ashes, but rises gloriously. This is true also for us, who are dust. If we, with our weaknesses, return to the Lord, if we take the path of love, then we will embrace the life that never ends. And we will be full of joy.

*--Fr. Anthony Ahamefula*