

Dear Friends,

In his message for Lent this year, our Holy Father, Pope Francis wrote: “Lent is a new beginning, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter, Christ’s victory over death. This season urgently calls us to conversion. Christians are asked to return to God ‘with all their hearts’ (Joel 2:12), to refuse to settle for mediocrity and to grow in friendship with the Lord.” Sometimes, though, we do settle for mediocrity, don’t we? Sometimes we forget who we are and the goal of our lives. We are gifted with these forty days, then, to discover anew the meaning and goal of our lives. It is a life won for us by the cross of Jesus Christ, and it is in the cross that we are to boast and in nothing else.

The cross though is difficult to accept. It is not a shiny silver or gold emblem we wear around our necks. The cross was an instrument of torture and death. It was meant to put fear in the lives of all who saw it. Yet Christ turned that instrument of death into the means of new and everlasting life. Through his triumph over the cross we discover the truth that “evil vanishes before the certainty of the resurrection and the love of God” (Pope Francis).

This year’s theme for Lent comes from Pope Francis’ prayer during the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, 2016: “O Cross of Christ, Save Us.” Evil is still present in peoples’ lives, in ours and in those of our neighbors. That is why I am inviting us to turn our attention to the cross this Lent, praying that we and all people may be delivered from the powers of death that try to steal us away from the life Christ won for us.

On Ash Wednesday, after receiving ashes, everyone will be handed an olivewood palm cross to carry throughout Lent. This cross in our pockets will be a tangible reminder of God’s saving love for us as well as a reminder to pray daily to be relieved from whatever holds us and others in the grip of death. At the end of Mass everyone will be given a prayer card to accompany the cross in our pockets.

During each of the six weeks we will focus our attention on a specific cross in the lives of God’s people beginning first on Ash Wednesday with a Prayer for Hope in the Midst of our Crosses. As we highlight the different crosses we will also publish in the weekly bulletin a prayer to offer that is specific to that cross, information on how the cross is present today, and some suggested actions to help alleviate those crosses. While offering these prayers I encourage us to pray for freedom from the crosses that overshadow our own lives.

As we begin these forty days let us pray for one another. May the cross of Christ become for us again the power of God and the wisdom of God to save us from all that keeps us from living as sons and daughters of so great a heavenly Father. May Easter find us celebrating with great joy the triumph of the Cross of Christ.

Peace and blessings,
Fr. John