

Dear brother, dear sister, peace and hope !

It is in circumstances of life in a shaken area of Africa, area shaken by strikes for democracy, freedom, justice, equality, human promotion, etc., that I desire, at the beginning of this 2011 Lenten season, to address to you a message for a Lenten season full of hope, faith, solidarity and love.

Lent is always considered for Christians, as a favourable period for fast. But I must admit that the meaning of that fast is most of time misunderstood.

What is, for a believer, a Christian, the meaning of fast and why fast during the Lenten season?

To fast means to abstain oneself from: eating, drinking ... during one or more days, from the rising of the sun to its setting. A person (human being), being body and soul, it would be useless to imagine a religion purely spiritual. To involve (commit) itself, the soul needs acts and attitudes from the body. Fast accompanied by prayers, serve to express humility in front of God: to fast equal then to humble his soul.

Fast is not an ascetic exploit, it does not aim at procuring some psychological or religious exaltation state. In the Biblical context, fast consist of turning oneself towards God in an attitude of dependence and total abandon for imploring pardon, opening oneself to divine light, waiting for the necessary grace to accomplish a mission, etc.

Occasions and reasons for fasting are many and various. But in all reasons or occasions, we must establish ourselves with faith in an attitude of humility to welcome God's action and to put ourselves in God's presence.

The true fast does not then consist of formalism or pride to be seen by people but, it must be united to the love of neighbour and comprise a search of true justice. It is not separable of alms and prayers. The true fast is therefore an active expression of one's love and solidarity with neighbour (in the sense that Saints Paul and John tell us: "To love one's neighbour is to love God"). The fasting should not be lived in ringing clocks or alerting all the Medias of the world saying "I am fasting"; it must be lived and done in discretion and harmony. That is why Jesus invites us in Matthew 6, 17 ..., to do the fasting in discretion, a fasting that is known by God only. This kind of fast is a pure expression of hope and trust in God, a humble fast which opens our heart to interior justice, solidarity, love, etc., work of our Father who sees and act in secret.

Lent, a favourable time to establish oneself with faith, love; hope, solidarity, etc., in an attitude of humility and availability to welcome God's action and to put oneself in God's presence. May it be then for you, brother, sister, friend ... that time full of hope and motivation to walk step by step in trust, faith, prayer, love, solidarity, etc., with your God, your Lord and your neighbour towards Easter.

Yours,

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