



In his message for the upcoming Lenten season, **Pope Francis urged people to renew their enthusiasm for the faith, using this season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving as an opportunity to stoke the flame of charity in their heart.**

“Above all, I urge the members of the Church to take up the Lenten journey with enthusiasm, sustained by almsgiving, fasting and prayer,” the Pope said in his message, published Feb. 6.

“If, at times, the flame of charity seems to die in our own hearts, know that this is never the case in the heart of God! He constantly gives us a chance to begin loving anew.”

At the Easter Vigil, we will light the Easter candle, he said, explaining how it symbolizes a “new fire,” and will “slowly overcome the darkness and illuminate the liturgical assembly.”

**“May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds,”** he continued. “By listening to God’s word and drawing nourishment from the table of the Eucharist, may our hearts be ever more ardent in faith, hope and love.”

Written on the Solemnity of All Saints, the Pope’s message for Lent is on the theme: “Because of the increase of iniquity, the love of many will grow cold (Matt. 24:12).”

In the message, he warned against both cold hearts and “false prophets,” which he said tempt us to be led and enslaved by our emotions, or by a desire for wealth. “How many of God’s children are mesmerized by momentary pleasures, mistaking them for true happiness!” he wrote.

This is the core of Pope Francis' Lenten message: to draw attention to the fact that there are many experiences which "whittle away all of [our] enthusiasm and zeal" for the faith, Cardinal Peter Turkson told CNA Feb. 6.

Head of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, he said that living as a disciple of Jesus has a lot of challenges, and therefore Francis' message highlights the need to re-kindle the fire of our faith.

**"Love can become cold because there are very many things which prevent it from sustaining the warmth of enthusiasm that it had,"** Turkson explained. Therefore, this message invites us, through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, to re-inspire our love of God and neighbor.

"And this is crucial because all the good works that we decide to do... are all animated by a sense of love," he continued.

Seeing the problems in the world and within ourselves, the solution is to turn to the Church, Pope Francis said, because along with the truth, she "offers us in the Lenten season the soothing remedy of prayer, almsgiving and fasting."

One of the biggest obstacles to charity, he continued, is the evil of greed of money, which is what almsgiving helps to counteract.

"How I would like almsgiving to become a genuine style of life for each of us!" the Pope said. "How I would like us, as Christians, to follow the example of the Apostles and see in the sharing of our possessions a tangible witness of the communion that is ours in the Church!"

Almsgiving is very fitting during Lent, he continued, but added that he hopes that "even in our daily encounters with those who beg for our assistance, we would see such

requests as coming from God himself.”

Almsgiving, along with prayer and fasting, are intended as instruments to fight both sin within ourselves and its effect on the world. For from greed, follows “the rejection of God and his peace,” he said. We begin to prefer “our own desolation rather than the comfort found in his word and the sacraments.”

Greed also may lead us to violence, he noted, pointing to how we lash out, in particular, at those we think threaten the “certainties” of our lives, such as the unborn child, the elderly and infirm, the immigrant, or even just the neighbor “who does not live up to our expectations.”

Almsgiving is a way of setting us free from greed, acknowledging that “what I possess is never mine alone.”

In fasting, too, we are given the opportunity to grow, he said, both by experiencing the hunger that many people around the world experience daily, and by expressing our own “spiritual hunger and thirst for life in God.”

“Fasting wakes us up. It makes us more attentive to God and our neighbor. It revives our desire to obey God, who alone is capable of satisfying our hunger,” he said.

He explained that devoting more time to prayer also helps us to root out vice from our hearts and to find consolation in God, who is our Father and who “wants us to live life well.”

“Lent summons us, and enables us, to come back to the Lord wholeheartedly and in every aspect of our life,” the Pope said. “With this message, I would like again this year to help the entire Church experience this time of grace anew, with joy and in truth.”

He also said that the Church would again be celebrating the “24 Hours for the Lord” initiative, which is a day for the whole Church to focus on the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation, within the context of Eucharistic adoration.

This year, it will take place March 9-10, he said, inspired by the words of Psalm 130:4, “With you is forgiveness.” In each diocese, at least one church will remain open for twenty-four consecutive hours, he said, offering opportunities for adoration and sacramental confession.

Led by Pope Francis, “24 Hours for the Lord” is a worldwide initiative which points to confession as a primary way to experience God's merciful embrace. It was launched in 2014 under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.