



God offers us each year the season of Lent as a “sacramental sign” of our conversion,” and therefore we are summoned to—and enabled to—come back to the Lord wholeheartedly and in every aspect of our life.

Pope Francis stressed this in his message for Lent 2018 (14 February to 29 March) presented today in the Vatican, by Cardinal Peter Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, which was titled: “Because of the increase of iniquity, the love of many will grow cold” (Mt 24:12).

In the message, the Holy Father took as a starting point Jesus’ words in the Gospel of St. Matthew (Mt 24:12), namely that, “Because of the increase of iniquity, the love of many will grow cold” (24:12).

In the episode a disciple had asked Jesus a question, and in response, Jesus foretells a great tribulation and describes a situation in which the community of believers might well find itself. Amid great trials, Christ predicts, false prophets would lead people astray and the love that is the core of the Gospel would grow cold in the hearts of many.

With this as the basis, the Holy Father divides his message into four sections:

- “False Prophets”
- “A Cold Heart”
- “What are we to do”
- “The fire of Easter”

Warning against false prophets, the Pope stressed, these ‘prophets’ assume various forms, such as “snake charmers”, who manipulate human emotions in order to enslave others and lead them where they would have them go.

“How many of God’s children are mesmerized by momentary pleasures, mistaking them for true happiness! How many men and women live entranced by the dream of wealth, which only makes them slaves to profit and petty interests! How many go through life

believing that they are sufficient unto themselves, and end up entrapped by loneliness!"

False prophets also can be "charlatans", who offer easy and immediate solutions to suffering that soon prove utterly useless.

In order to confound the human heart, the Argentine Pope said, the devil, who is "a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44), has always presented evil as good, falsehood as truth. That is why each of us is called to peer into our heart to see if we are falling prey to the lies of these false prophets.

"We must learn to look closely, beneath the surface, and to recognize what leaves a good and lasting mark on our hearts, because it comes from God and is truly for our benefit."

The Holy Father went on to warn against when our hearts become 'cold,' and asked faithful to reflect on when we become indifferent and isolated.

"What are the signs that indicate that our love is beginning to cool?"

While we may see deep within ourselves and all about us these negative signs, Francis said, the Church' proposes a 'soothing remedy,' namely of prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

By devoting more time to prayer, he expressed, we enable our hearts to root out our secret lies and forms of self-deception, and then to find the consolation God offers. He is our Father, the Pope noted, reminding He wants us to live life well.

Almsgiving, he continued, sets us free from greed and helps us to regard our neighbor as a brother or sister, whereas fasting weakens our tendency to violence. "It disarms us and becomes an important opportunity for growth."

Saying, 'God constantly gives us a chance to begin loving anew,' he encouraged all members of the Church to take up the Lenten journey with enthusiasm, sustained by almsgiving, fasting and prayer.

The document, signed on 1 November, the Solemnity of All Saints, concludes with the Pope's prayer: 'May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds', and enable all of us to relive the experience of the disciples on the way to Emmaus."

Pope Francis concluded, praying that 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.

