



Dear Confreres and Consoeurs,

Our merciful Father sent us his own Son as the ultimate example of his infinite love towards us. Lent is a very good time to celebrate and experience that love by listening to the word of the Lord, praying and engaging in charitable activities.

The joyous news of God's mercy should prompt our gratitude. We should express it in the "conversion" of our heart and our capacity for mercy. "Conversion" means we must change our mentality and our attitude and realize that we are dust and ashes in front of God, He who revealed Himself in Christ crucified.

The power of the almighty Father is completely revealed in the mystery of the Cross. Our Lord paid an enormous price in order to reconquer and reconcile Himself with His creation: the blood of his only begotten Son.

The message for Lent written by Pope Francis under the scripture, *"I prefer mercy over sacrifice"* (Mt 9,13) is an open invitation to practise corporal and spiritual works of mercy:

"In the corporal works of mercy we touch the flesh of Christ with our brothers and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, visited; in the spiritual works of mercy - counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer - we touch more directly our own sinfulness. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy must never be separated. By touching the flesh of the crucified Jesus in His suffering, sinners can receive the gift of realizing that they too are poor and in need."

Some of these works are truly representative of the times in which we are now living: bringing help to the refugees and evicted families who ask for shelter, the distribution of clothing and food to so many people struck by the financial crisis, caring for the ill and their families, eradicating illiteracy in Third World countries, spreading the truth of God's infinite love to those in doubt, evangelizing those who cannot distinguish good from bad, praying for those who don't know how to pray or for those who perish suddenly, unaware of the sense of their own lives.

These works of mercy as an answer to God's freely given love should consist of a regular exercise of "conversion" and charity within our own family and, moreover, with those who suffer spiritual and material poverty in all its forms.

I wish you all a humble and fertile path in Lent, rich in "conversion" and works of mercy. I have all of you in my prayers and I give you my blessing from the bottom of my heart.

Monsg. Michele Pennisi, Ecclesiastical Grand Prior