

**Lent- a Time of Conversion and Renewal of Relationship:** Once again, we find ourselves in the liturgical season of Lent. This is a time to focus on our growth in holiness and virtue through prayer, fasting and almsgiving as we anticipate the suffering Jesus endured to reconcile us to the Father, leading us to the greatest feast of our faith, Easter. It's a time for inner conversion and renewal of our relationship with God, others and self. We began this renewal with the imposition of ashes on the foreheads, reminding ourselves that we are mortal and sinners. Our sins displease God, others and self; thus, imposition of ashes is also a sign that we mourn for our sins. Hence, as mortals and sinners, we are called to return to the Lord with all our heart, with prayer, fasting, almsgiving and mourning for our sins.

Repentance has a special reference to God the Father, and faith, to Jesus Christ the eternal Son. Repentance of itself is not sufficient-it makes no satisfaction for the law of God which we have broken; and hence, over and above repentance, there is required from us faith in the Gospel, wherein Christ is revealed to us as a propitiation for sin, and as the only way of reconciliation with the Father. Without faith repentance becomes despair, and without repentance faith becomes only presumption. Join the two together, and the faithful soul is borne onwards, like a well-balanced vessel, to the haven where it would be.

Before Jesus began His ministry, He went into the desert. He withdrew from His normal life and spent time alone. The temptation of Jesus in the desert prepared Him for His mission. St. Francis of Assisi observed Lents in fasting, solitude and prayer. Francis would spend probably three and perhaps as many as five periods of about 40 days each in relative seclusion, dedicating himself to prayer and fasting in solitude, sometimes with one or other of the brothers, sometimes by himself. He withdrew to hermitages seeking a secluded and contemplative way of life. Basically, Francis was creating the space and time to step apart and reflect on how God was asking him to deepen his commitment in terms of the ever-changing situation of his life. "When blessed Francis stayed constantly in a place to pray...he was always anxious to know the will of the Lord, about how he could please him better" (Assisi Compilation, 118).

Lent is also a time for us for our desert experience. The desert experience involves a withdrawal. We all need to withdraw from our daily routine to pray, to spiritually nourish our life. During this time of withdrawal, we can examine our life to where we stand before God. It's time for self-examination. When we have examined ourselves of what good and bad we possess; then inner conversion of heart is must to regain our lost self. Repentance is not just feeling sorry for our sins but metanoia (change of mind, heart and life), it's a sincere resolution and endeavor, to the utmost of our power, to confirm all words and actions to the laws of God. Therefore, it's not just a one-time event but regularly doing the best to align our life with the will of God. The whole point of repentance is conversion and renewal of relationship with God, others and self, and if it is not that, then it is useless.

*Fr. Manoj Xalxo, OFM*