



PARISH LINK



The Newsletter of the Catholic Commission for Social Justice Issue 13, February 2015

Lenten Message of our Holy Father, Pope Francis

Theme: **“Make your hearts firm”** (James 5:8)



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LENT
PRAYER
FASTING
REPENTANCE
RESURRECTION

INTRODUCTION BY LEELA RAMDEEN, CHAIR, CCSJ

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In this issue of Parish Link, CCSJ shares with you Pope Francis' Lenten Message for 2015, which reflects on the theme: ***“Make your hearts firm”*** (James 5:8).

In his Message, the Holy Father asks us to reflect on 3 biblical texts:

1. “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Corinthians 12:26) – The Church
2. “Where is your brother?” (Genesis 4:9) – Parishes and Communities
3. “Make your hearts firm!” (James 5:8) – Individual Christians.



CCSJ's Chair
Leela Ramdeen

For some time now, Pope Francis has been condemning global indifference to the pain and suffering of others. For example, during his visit to Lampedusa in July 2013, Pope Francis highlighted the plight of “immigrants dying at sea, in boats which were vehicles of hope and became vehicles of death.” He shared his distress at the “tragedy” which has become like “a painful thorn in my heart.” He felt “shame” at the plight of those who were suffering and the indifference of the world.

One of the most heartrending statements in Pope Francis' Lenten Message reads: “Usually, when we are healthy and comfortable, we forget about others (something God the Father never does): we are unconcerned with their problems, their sufferings and the injustices they endure... Our heart grows cold...how greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference!” He reminds us that “A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters...”

In a world in which millions are suffering as a result of poverty, wars, social exclusion, human trafficking, slavery etc., too many people are showing no care or concern – they are apathetic. Our silence/inaction could make us complicit to the various forms of injustice that threaten to overwhelm us. We have a duty, as Catholics, to SEE, JUDGE, and ACT; to be living witnesses to our Faith. Let us move out of our comfort zone and promote a culture of life and solidarity. May the “voice of the prophets...cry out and trouble our conscience.”

Leela, Chair, CCSJ

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2015

“Make your hearts firm” (James 5:8)



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each communities and every believer. Above all it is a “time of grace” (2 Cor6:2). God does not ask of us anything that he himself has not first given us. “We love because he first has loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). He is not aloof from us. Each one of us has a place in his heart. He knows us by name, he cares for us and he seeks us out whenever we turn away from him. He is interested in each of us; his love does not allow him to be indifferent to what happens to us. Usually, when we are healthy and comfortable, we forget about others (something God the Father never does): we are unconcerned with their problems, their sufferings and the injustices they endure... Our heart grows cold. As long as I am relatively healthy and comfortable, I don’t think about those less well off. Today, this selfish attitude of indifference has taken on global proportions, to the extent that we can speak of a globalization of indifference. It is a problem which we, as Christians, need to confront.



When the people of God are converted to his love, they find answers to the questions that history continually rises. One of the most urgent challenges which I would like to address in this Message is precisely the globalization of indifference.

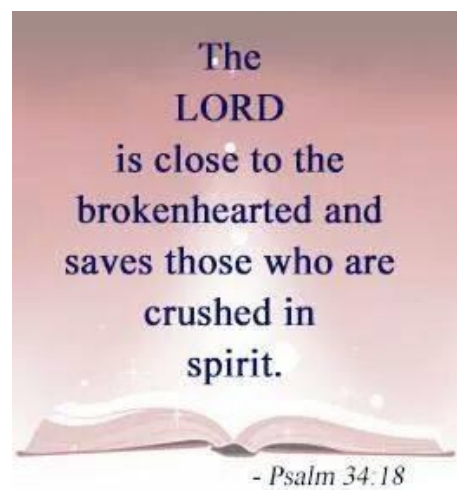
Indifference to our neighbour and to God also represents a real temptation for us Christians. Each year during Lent we need to hear once more the voice of the prophets who cry out and trouble our conscience.

God is not indifferent to our world; he so loves it that he gave his Son for our salvation. In the Incarnation, in the earthly life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, the gate between God and man, between heaven and earth, opens once for all. The Church is like the hand holding open this gate, thanks to her proclamation of God's word, her celebration of the sacraments and her witness of the faith which works through love (cf. *Gal 5:6*).



But the world tends to withdraw into itself and shut that door through which God comes into the world and the world comes to him. Hence the hand, which is the Church, must never be surprised if it is rejected, crushed and wounded.

God's people, then, need this **interior renewal**, lest we become indifferent and withdraw into ourselves. To further this renewal, I would like to propose for our reflection three biblical texts.



- Psalm 34:18

1. ***“If one member suffers, all suffer together”*** **(1 Cor 12:26) – The Church**

The love of God breaks through that fatal withdrawal into ourselves which is indifference. The Church offers us this love of God by her teaching and especially by her witness. But we can only bear witness to what we ourselves have experienced. Christians are those who let God clothe them with goodness and mercy, with Christ, so as to become, like Christ, servants of God and others. This is clearly seen in the liturgy of Holy Thursday, with its rite of the washing of feet. Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet, but he came to realize that Jesus does not wish to be just an example of how we should wash one another's feet. Only those who have first allowed Jesus to wash their own feet can then offer this service to others. Only they have “a part” with him (*Jn 13:8*) and thus can serve others.



Lent is a favourable time for letting Christ serve us so that we in turn may become more like him. This happens whenever we hear the word of God and receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. There we become what we receive: the Body of Christ. In this body there is no room for the indifference which so often seems to possess our hearts. For whoever is of Christ, belongs to one body, and in him we cannot be indifferent to one another. “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honoured, all the parts share its joy” (*1Cor 12:26*).

The Church is the *communio sanctorum* not only because of her saints, but also because she is a communion in holy things: the love of God revealed to us in Christ and all his gifts. Among these gifts there is also the response of those who let themselves be touched by this love. In this communion of saints, in this sharing in holy things, no one possesses anything alone, but shares everything with others. And since we are united in God, we can do something for those who are far distant; those whom we could never reach on our own, because with

them and for them, we ask God that all of us may be open to his plan of salvation.

2. “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9) – Parishes and Communities

All that we have been saying about the universal Church must now be applied to the life of our parishes and communities. Do these ecclesial structures enable us to experience being part of one body? A body which receives and shares what God wishes to give? A body which acknowledges and cares for its weakest, poorest and most insignificant members? Or do we take refuge in a universal love that would embrace the whole world, while failing to see the **Lazarus** sitting before our closed doors (*Lk 16:19-31*)?



In order to receive what God gives us and to make it bear abundant fruit, we need to press beyond the boundaries of the visible Church in two ways.

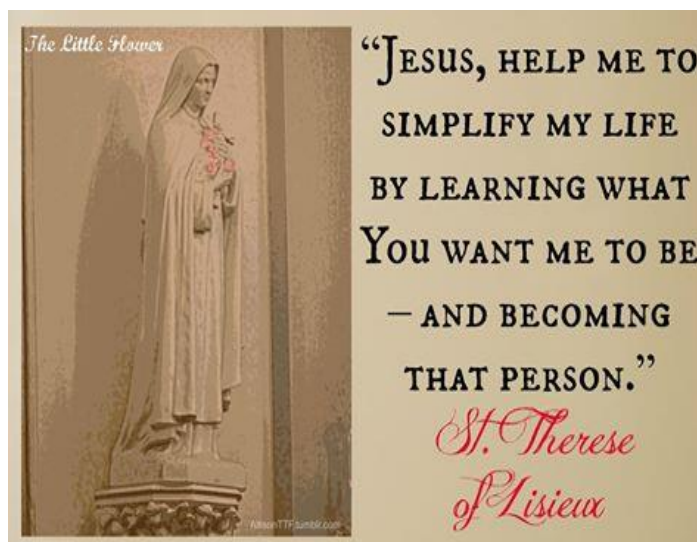
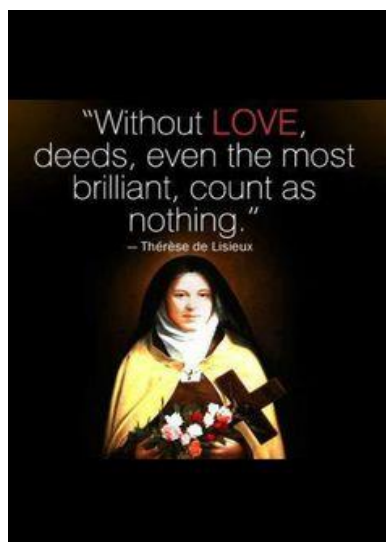
In the first place, by uniting ourselves in prayer with the Church in heaven. The prayers of the Church on earth establish a communion of mutual service and goodness which reaches up into the sight of God. Together with the saints who

have found their fulfilment in God, we form part of that communion in which indifference is conquered by love.

The Church in heaven is not triumphant because she has turned her back on the sufferings of the world and rejoices in splendid isolation. Rather, the saints already joyfully contemplate the fact that, through Jesus' death and resurrection, they have triumphed once and for all over indifference, hardness of heart and hatred. Until this victory of love penetrates the whole world, the saints continue to accompany us on our pilgrim way.



Saint Therese of Lisieux, a Doctor of the Church, expressed her conviction that the joy in heaven for the victory of crucified love remains incomplete as long as there is still a single man or woman on earth who suffers and cries out in pain: "I trust fully that I shall not remain idle in heaven; my desire is to continue to work for the Church and for souls" (*Letter 254*, July 14, 1897).



We share in the merits and joy of the saints, even as they share in our struggles and our longing for peace and reconciliation. Their joy in the victory of the Risen Christ gives us strength as we strive to overcome our indifference and hardness of heart.

In the second place, every Christian community is called to go out of itself and to be engaged in the life of the greater society of which it is a part, especially with the poor and those who are far away. The Church is missionary by her very nature; she is not self-enclosed but sent out to every nation and people.

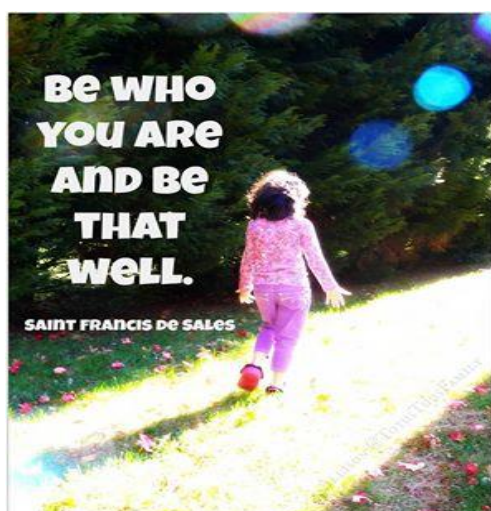
Her mission is to bear patient witness to the One who desires to draw all creation and every man and woman to the Father. Her mission is to bring to all a love which cannot remain silent. The Church follows Jesus Christ along the paths that lead to every man and woman, to the very ends of the earth (cf. *Acts* 1:8).

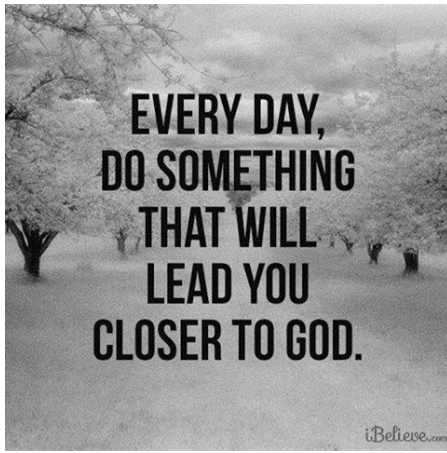
In each of our neighbours, then, we must see a brother or sister for whom Christ died and rose again. What we ourselves have received, we have received for them as well. Similarly, all that our brothers and sisters possess is a gift for the Church and for all humanity.

Dear brothers and sisters, how greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference!

3. “*Make your hearts firm!*” (*James* 5:8) – Individual Christians

As individuals too, we have are tempted by indifference. Flooded with news reports and troubling images of human suffering, we often feel our complete inability to help. What can we do to avoid being caught up in this spiral of distress and powerlessness?

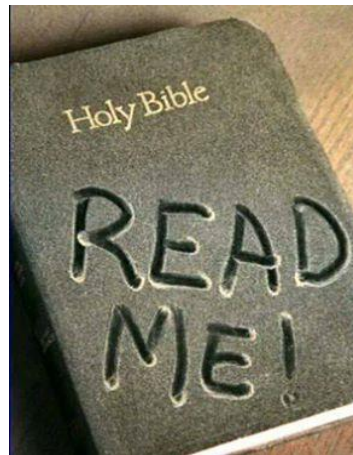
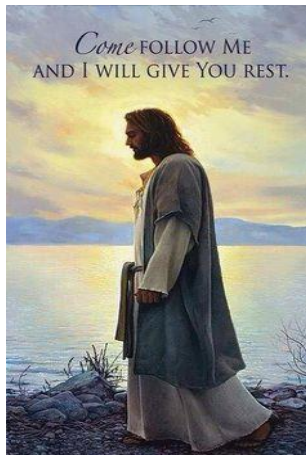




The age of casual Catholicism is over, the age of heroic Catholicism has begun. We can no longer be Catholics by accident but instead we must be Catholics by conviction

Fr. Terrence Henry, TOR, Franciscan University of Steubenville

First, we can pray in communion with the Church on earth and in heaven. Let us not underestimate the power of so many voices united in **prayer!** The *24 Hours for the Lord* initiative, which I hope will be observed on 13-14 March throughout the Church, also at the diocesan level, is meant to be a sign of this need for prayer.



Second, we can help by acts of charity, reaching out to both those near and far through the Church's many charitable organizations. Lent is a favourable time for showing this concern for others by small yet concrete signs of our belonging to the one human family.



Third, the suffering of others is a call to conversion, since their need reminds me of the uncertainty of my own life and my dependence on God and my brothers and sisters. If we humbly implore God's grace and accept our own limitations, we will trust in the infinite possibilities which God's love holds out to us. We will also be able to resist the diabolical temptation of thinking that by our own efforts we can save the world and ourselves.



As a way of overcoming indifference and our pretensions to self-sufficiency, I would invite everyone to live this Lent as an opportunity for engaging in what Benedict XVI called **a formation of the heart** (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 31). A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters. And, ultimately, a poor heart, one which realizes its own poverty and gives itself freely for others.

During this Lent, then, brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord: “*Fac cor nostrum secundum cor tuum*”: *Make our hearts like yours* (Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). In this way we will receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalization of indifference.

It is my prayerful hope that this Lent will prove spiritually fruitful for each believer and every ecclesial community. I ask all of you to pray for me. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady keeps you.

From the Vatican, 4 October 2014 *Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi*

CCSJ RESOURCES:

DVD Series of 2014 “Ask Why” TV Programme

Take-a-Bite DVD Series

Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching (KR Himes) \$80.00

Compendium of The Social Doctrine of the Church (Pontifical Council for J&P) \$140.00

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