

# Lent

## +Miguel Angel Batet

Lent is time of reflection. To reflect is to meditate deeply on the approaching Mystery. The Mystery of Easter is the greatest of all the Mysteries of the Church. We will meditate on this and symbolically in us the Mystical Death leading to the Resurrection will occur.

So many problems surround us, problems such as diseases, disagreements, and injustices. The world is a chaotic volcano dominated by intolerance. Intolerance lies at the base of a great part of the conflicts of humanity. It acts and conquers the mind of immature man, from the crude yet detrimental to the ever so subtle intolerance in ideas. Often the religious movements -and there are few if any exceptions- have given a very fruitful field for the incapacity of the human being to accept others, by exclusive thinking or by believing differently. But the Church gives us the opportunity to turn inwards to that within ourselves in this period of deep reflection, based on the internal freedom of the Faith.

The Liberal Catholic Church was given a message of much amplitude and freedom. From its beginning, its base was fixed in tolerance for ideas, understanding of differences and also the tacit acceptance of the unique and divine origin of all the religions. Many Liberal Catholics see Our Lord as a Unique Shepherd of all the souls in the world, as a Supreme Great Instructor of Angels and Men. We must however never lose this condition of freedom and tolerance that unites us, also not in the context of our sister churches. It may not become a reason for pride or subtle division. We must humbly make a contribution to the context of the religious world, a humble contribution, without the extravagances: Neither the aggrandisement motivated by a subtle belief of being the chosen vehicle, nor of being the only vehicle, nor the only Church that has the truth, nor the only Church chosen by the Lord to bless the world.

Our message would have to be one of unity, a contribution to the knowledge, of recognition of all the great religions of the world; but kindly emphasising the pressing reality that the world presents us, the human fruit of inflexibility and upset. Humankind dominates with its pride and inflexibility towards anything in its way. Great problems are approaching humanity, but these problems develop great conscience in many fields of human endeavour. It is sad and lamentable that not only is humankind harmed by its thoughtless way of acting and thinking, but that also in Nature everything is harmed. From the tiniest thing like the air that we breathe, up to the Planet itself, everything is bombarded by the chaotic way in which humankind thinks, feels and acts. For the most part communication and technology are badly harnessed by humankind through the mass media. They cause our mental and emotional atmosphere to be stunned and invaded by all kinds of obscenities, bad taste and create a generation of dependency to spurious aims, with the single and

unhealthy repeated intention to turn all of humankind into a mass rather than into thinking individuals.

For this reason, at this moment it is both eloquent and profound that the intention of the First Week of Lent is "Self Examination".

Bishop Leadbeater, with his characteristic depth and great knowledge, tells us about the matter of Lent in his magnificent work "The Inner Side of Christian Festivals":

The beautiful collect which we use every day throughout Lent is worthy of attention. "Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with Thy most gracious favour." I suppose that more than half, probably three-fourths of the people who hear those words do not know what they mean. That word prevent has come in these later days to have a meaning quite different from that which it had at the time of the so-called Reformation, when this collect was translated from the Latin. Many of us know enough Latin to be aware that venio means I come, and that pre is before. To prevent is therefore to come before. We can see that a man can become before another for various reasons. He could come before him to get in his way and stop him from doing something, which is our modern meaning of the word prevent. We can also see that a man might come before another in order to prepare his way, to make it easy for him. That is the mediaeval signification of the word prevent, and that is what it means in this collect when we say: "Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings". Go before us in all our doings during this season of Lent with Thy most gracious favour, so that under the influence of that benign favour those things may be what Thou wouldst have them to be - such as may deserve the favour and not such as would be shamed thereby. That is the meaning of those words, and that is precisely the idea. "May God be with us through all this time of Lent so that our feet shall not stray from the path, so that our words and our thoughts shall not offend."

God is indeed with us always, so perhaps we may add another shade of meaning and say: "May we during this period of Lent realise that God is with us..."

It is so significant that in the First Sunday of Lent, which is preceded by Ash Wednesday, the intention of the week is Self-Examination. Returning to Bishop Leadbeater, on the matter of this virtue he says in the aforementioned work:

In the Collect, Epistle and Gospel of the First Sunday in Lent, the necessity for self-examination is emphasised.

The writer of the Epistle says, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith." It is one of the many misunderstandings that have crept into Christianity during the ages which leads us to take that word "faith" in quite a wrong way. It has degenerated into a purely mechanical thing - the idea of a faith in the birth of Christ at a certain time, faith that he is the Saviour of the world and that we have only to cling to those two facts in order to come through somehow. That is not in the least what was meant by faith in the early days of the Church. Faith is certainly a strong belief, but it is a belief which has reason behind it. We accept certain things because they seem to us to be

reasonable, because they seem to us to be the most probable hypothesis where we cannot have absolute certainty. But our faith must be based on reason, and it must be such a faith as will lead us to act according to it. It is no use pretending to believe a thing when all the time we act as though we did not believe it. Our faith in connection with these higher matters should be as absolutely a definite thing as our faith on the physical plane that boiling water will scald us or that a red-hot bar will burn us. We believe those things, and we believe them strongly enough to keep our hands out of the boiling water and away from the red-hot bar. That is a faith that is worth something, but a faith that is merely up in the air and does not lead to any results is a very poor thing indeed; I do not think it is worth calling a faith.

Now when the writer of that Epistle says: "See that you are in the faith", one thing he means quite clearly is: "See that your faith is the Christian teaching, and that it is reasonable common sense." There is certainly a vast amount of utter vagueness in religion, as well as a great deal of illusion and superstition. People have certain beliefs and they cling to them without any reason...

...People talk about having faith, and they cannot define it with any accuracy or certainty."

Somewhat earlier in the same chapter he says:

The whole of the services in Lent are aimed at helping us in the work of curing our defects. The very colour of violet which the Church uses is not chosen at random; it is selected because of the piercing and purifying character of its vibrations. In earlier times the whole of the building was hung with the colour of the day, and not only the altar and officiants. It was the idea that in an atmosphere permeated with violet light this work of purification would be found somewhat easier.

All these things are scientific if we understand them; but the meaning of this ritual has been forgotten, and it is taken to be merely a sort of ordinance of the Church, and few know or care why it was ordered. There is a real reason for it, and there are books on such subjects for those who care for them. Symbolically this period indicates the fourth of the great stages of man's development; for Lent is all part of the preparation for the right celebration of that great Initiation at Easter. That is the symbolical meaning of it; but it has a practical and every-day application to our lives as well.

If we look inwards, towards the mind and the heart -united, after driving out common influences- as vehicles of the true inner human, which make us reflect, then we can change our surroundings. We are directly responsible for whatever happens, although we do not always accept this. We have always eluded the direct or indirect responsibility of that which happens around us. We can change, we can change our surroundings, change the world. But where to begin? I believe that the inner human begins the deep and serious change from within towards a reflection on the exterior, equally so in his or her thoughts, emotions and actions.

If we look around us, life provides us countless opportunities to live in Unity and deep Unity of conscience. We live facing one another, in supposedly spiritualised levels, where much is spoken of spiritual life, but the circumstances of daily life say the opposite. The same Church is a clear example of this, as they repeat the words of the Teacher: "they will know you as my disciples if you love one another", yet see what happens. In the Third Message of Fatima, which Our Lady transmitted in 1919 to the humble children, she amongst others warns that the Church of the Lord is in serious danger. Bishops are pitted against bishops, priests against priests, personal interests predominate over those of the Church, and Christ bears it all in silence.

Let us reflect, brethren, on the words the Lord said to Francis on calling him to the Ministry: "Francis sees and saves my Church". Everyone, bishops, priests, deacons and clergy, lay brethren in general, together we make the Church a Channel for the World when Christ, watching our work, sees it as humble and finds it acceptable before His eyes. It does not matter how humble or small the congregation is. If it is united and has firm intentions, then it will be a perfect channel for the Love of the Lord of the World. Even in the humble and solitary service of a priest in his oratory, the Love of Christ spreads across the world, shedding blessing of huge magnitude, blessing that is a manifestation of that Love. How rare a privilege the Lord has placed in our hands and how foolish we are that we fail to take advantage of it.