

“There is No Fear in Love!”

We have begun the Lenten Season: no alleluias in church, no flowers, no songs, purple color of the priestly vestments. Coupled with the virus, Lent can become, a very depressing season in our liturgical year.

It's the season when we give up things or activities that we normally enjoy.
It's the season when we make sacrifices and fast.

Lent, if not rightly understood, can become a time when the whole season is spent just wishing it were over!

Yet, this is not the vision that the Church has for Lent; and this is certainly not the vision that our Liturgy has of the season. The Church Liturgy sees Lent as a time when *we fast in order to feast*.

Lent is a time of preparation for renewal through the traditional means of fasting, prayer and almsgiving. These disciplines of Lent are not *ends in themselves*, but the means by which we prepare for baptism, and its renewal, in the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Where, “Mystery” stands for unfathomable salvific action of God who comes to the rescue of those who were lost and were unable to come back.

During this time, we learn that we have to pass, to move from:

- from the visible to the invisible,
- from the head to the heart,
- from the loneliness of our selfishness to the bliss of being a faith community,
- from fear to love.

This last step is the most difficult to be taken. We know that the opposite of love is not hate, but fear. John reminds us that: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). Paul tells us that: “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Rom. 8:15).

Where there is love there are no demands, no expectations, no dependency.

Fear and hiding: “I was afraid, and I hid myself!” said Adam.

Fear of the different, fear of the “Muslims”, fear of old age, fear of different foods, fear of Corona virus, fear of people, and also Fear of God.

This fear can take different faces:

1. We all struggle to believe that God is the last person of whom we need to be afraid. Every instance in scripture where God appears within ordinary life the first words are invariably: "Do not be afraid!"
2. Fear that God is not as understanding and compassionate as we are.
3. Fear that God is not as big-hearted as we are.
4. Fear that God gives us only one chance and cannot bear any missteps and infidelities.

What are the principles inviting us to live in less fear?

1. God's insight and understanding surpass our own.
2. God's compassion and forgiveness surpass our own.
3. God is a blessing parent, not a threatening, vengeful Boss.
4. God can handle our questions and doubts and angers.
5. God gives us more than one chance, opening another door every time we close one.
6. God desires our salvation and the salvation of our loved ones more than we do.

This is what we celebrate at Easter: "Hate is strong to the point of being able to kill God himself. Love is stronger because Jesus is resurrected." The traditional paschal greeting was: "Christos Anesti" meaning "Christ is risen" with the answer: "Alithos anesti!" He is risen indeed! Pessimism, sadness, despondency have no reason to exist!