What are you giving up for lent?

Dear Brothers,

Often we experience Lent as little more than a joke! At least in the present context we ignore the season without making any effort to make any benefit out of it. It never even occur to us that Lent is something we might actually be interested in or decide to keep or come to value as a way of getting to know God better.

In the ancient time, Lent was a time for new converts to be instructed for baptism and for believers caught in sin, to focus on repentance. Now we see Lent as a season to be reminded of our need for penitence and to prepare spiritually for the celebration of Easter. As part of this preparation involved the Lenten “fast” giving up something special during these six weeks of Lent. God’s grace has been fully given to us in Christ. We can’t earn it b doing extra things or giving up certain other things in fasting. If you see Lent as a time to grow more deeply in God’s grace, the we are approaching Lent from a proper perspective.

Lent is a season to do something extra for God, not to give something up. Fasting from something must help us to focus on God. It should help us to look beyond Good Friday and Easter and thus appreciating more deeply the meaning of the cross and the victory of the resurrection. Dullas Willard, an American philosopher who is known for his writings on Christian spiritual formation has said that “if a certain spiritual discipline help us to grow in God’s grace then by all means do it”. We should realize that the thousands of Christians have found the recognition of the season of Lent enriches our worship and deepens our faith in God.

To make the season special before Easter in some way, why not we choose to add a spiritual discipline to our lives? First, by giving up something allows us to make a tangible sacrifice to the Lord. This act of sacrifice reminds us of our commitment to God and our desire to make him first in our lives. Second, by giving up something we usually enjoy on a daily basis. We have been tempted to give up our Lenten Fast at times. We can easily argue that it is optional, not taught in scripture etc. But certainly it raises our awareness of how much we depend on other things in life rather than the Lord. There are all sorts of little idols in our lives. Fasting, in some way helps us to surrender our “idols” to God. Third, when we give up something we feel an unquenched desire for it. And this desire is the heart of true spirituality.

The spiritual discipline can be practised during this Lent by the “special fast” which I have mentioned above. In the words of Pope Francis;

Fast from hurting words and say kind words.

Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.

Fast from anger and be filled with patience.

Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.

Fast from worries and have trust in God

Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.

Fast from pressures and be prayerful.

Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.

Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.

Fast from grudges and be reconciled.

Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

Certainly, this is a spiritual discipline. This time let us try to change the pattern of Lent in our lives. When we are ready to give up and fast from, I pray that God will draw us closer to him and prepare us for a fresh experience of Good Friday and Easter.

Be mindful of the words from Pope Francis, “No matter how much time you spend fasting, no matter how much you sleep on a hard floor and eat ashes and sigh continually, if you do no good to others, you do nothing great”.

May God’s peace be with you!