



# Pope Francis' Message for Lent 2017

## "The Word is a gift. Other persons are a gift."

*Reflections in the Light of Sacred Heart Spirituality  
and the Calls of General Chapter 2016*

Pope Francis' Message for Lent 2017 speaks vividly to our world today. As Francis reflects on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man we can give the characters contemporary names and faces. We can see Lazarus in the many socially and economically excluded people whom rich and powerful figures are seeking to turn away or throw out today.

The purpose of this reflection sheet is to encourage members of the Sacred Heart Family to reflect on Pope Francis' Message in the light of core elements of our spirituality, and the calls, or major directions, identified by General Chapter 2016.

You can access the full text of Pope Francis' Message for Lent 2017 here:

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/len/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161018\\_messaggio-quaresima2017.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/len/documents/papa-francesco_20161018_messaggio-quaresima2017.html)

## A Way of the Heart

The heart is a central image and pathway to God for those who share in Sacred Heart spirituality.



Pope Francis reminds us that Lent is a time to return to God with all our hearts

(Joel 2:12). It is not surprising that Pope Francis often uses the language of the heart because the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola, which guides Francis as a Jesuit, is also a way of the heart.

During Lent we can ask ourselves:

- Who or what has my heart right now?
- Where and when is my heart most distant from the feelings, attitudes and preferences of the Heart of God?
- How might I return to God in a more whole-hearted way?

## A Contemplative Spirit



Sacred Heart spirituality is contemplative – it listens for the heartbeat of God in the world and responds in love. In his Message, Pope Francis says “at the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply.”

Our charism teaches the importance of silence for deep listening. Furthermore, one of the calls discerned by General Chapter 2016 is to create silence. In our noisy world and busy lives, silence doesn't just happen; it has to be actively created. The Chapter described this as a call to “... deepen our interior life, our capacity for contemplation and for listening to the heartbeat of God in ourselves and in our world; to discern in silence and welcome the action of the Spirit that transforms us, energizes, and calls us to live our prophetic and educational ministry.” (General Chapter 2016, p 19.)

During Lent we can ask ourselves:

- How shall I create the pools of silence that are necessary in my life, and in the life of my community, for deep listening?
- Where do I hear the heartbeat of God in the world today?
- What contemplative practice can I commit to during this season?

## A Relational Spirituality Chooses a Humanizing Path

Pope Francis' Message for Lent 2017 focuses on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16: 19 – 31). Francis reflects on it at length because he says that it “provides a key for understanding what we need to do to attain true happiness and eternal life.”

Pope Francis draws our attention to the fact that the poor man is described in great detail. He is not anonymous, he is a human being with a name – Lazarus – and “his features are clearly delineated ... he appears as an individual with his own story ... a gift, a priceless treasure, a human being whom God loves and cares for.” Hence the parable “invites us to open the doors of our heart to others because each person is a gift” and every person we encounter deserves “acceptance, respect and love.”

Sacred Heart spirituality seeks to take up this invitation. That is why we describe Sacred Heart spirituality as relational - it calls us into right relationships with each other, the whole of creation, and with God.



During Lent we can ask ourselves:

- Do I offer acceptance, respect and love to each person I meet?
- What gets in the way of my seeing and responding to the humanity of others?
- How many people who are socially or economically excluded do I know by name?

Pope Francis goes on to note that the rich man does not have a name. He says that in the parable's description of him "we can catch a dramatic glimpse of the corruption of sin, which progresses in three successive stages: love of money, vanity and pride." The rich man is chained to "a selfish logic that leaves no room for love" and is "a prisoner to outward appearances, to the most superficial and fleeting aspects of existence." The effect of sin is to make the rich man less human – he "dresses like a king and acts like a god, forgetting that he is merely mortal."

Of course both men are mortal and we are familiar with how the parable ends in

the afterlife. Pope Francis says that the root of the rich man's woes was his failure to heed God's word "as a result he no longer loved God and grew to despise his neighbour."

Another of Chapter 2016's calls was to live more humanly, that is to opt for that which is humanizing in the face of dehumanizing forces such as the love of money, vanity and pride. This is how the Chapter document describes this call: "In the radical style of Jesus of Nazareth, we wish to be in closer relationship as sisters with one another and with others; we wish to be simpler, more human and closer to people and their experience, in order to show forth the joyful and compassionate face of God and to be at the service of Life, wherever we are sent." (General Chapter 2016 p 19)

During Lent we can ask ourselves:

- Have I become so caught up in riches, honour and pride that I no longer understand my own humanity or fail to uphold the human dignity of others?
- How can I respond to dehumanizing forces in the world today?
- Can I live more simply and share more generously?



## Setting Sail Again

Pope Francis affirms that “the word of God is alive and powerful, capable of converting hearts and leading them back to God.” He says that “when we close our heart to the gift of God’s word, we end up closing our heart to the gift of our brothers and sisters.” Lent is a time to return to God’s word and to reach out to our sisters and brothers, especially those in need. Lent send us out to those on the margins. It reconnects us as members of the Body of Christ.



At Chapter 2016 the Society listened deeply to God’s word and pondered who we were being called to be, and what we were called to do at this time. Two more calls identified by the Chapter were: to be and to act as one body; and to reach new frontiers.

The Chapter invites the Society, and the whole Sacred Heart Family, to go out to the margins “to accompany the life that is emerging there, to defend justice, peace and the integrity of creation in response

to all of those who are searching for meaning in their lives, those who have been wounded, displaced, and excluded because of poverty, violence, and environmental degradation.” (General Chapter 2016, p 18) We must not close our hearts to Lazarus at our gate today.

But we do not reach out to others alone – we do so as part of the Society, which is one body, and part of the Body of Christ. In responding to those on the margins this Lent we can take up the General Chapter’s call to “revitalize our unity in diversity and to act as one body, dynamic, interconnected, linked with other bodies, in the world and as Church, in order to share, collaborate, and be in solidarity among ourselves and with others.” (General Chapter 2016, p 19)

Pope Francis encourages us all to take part in the Lenten campaigns promoted by “many Church organisations in different parts of the world, and thus to favour the culture of encounter in our one human family.”

This Lent we can ask ourselves:

- Am I willing to reach out to those on the edges, or does my almsgiving take place from within my comfort zone?
- How do my efforts to express solidarity connect me with other people and parts of the Church?
- Which Lenten campaigns will I support this year?