

Pope Encourages Faithful to Return to the Essential During Lent

Pope Francis on March 6, Ash Wednesday, delivered a simple and direct message at the start of Lent: return to what is essential.

“To return. If we have to return, it means that we have wandered off,” the Holy Father said. “Lent is the time to rediscover the *direction of life*. Because in life’s journey, as in every journey, what really matters is not to lose sight of the goal.”

“If what interests us as we travel, however, is looking at the scenery or stopping to eat, we will not get far,” the Holy Father continued. “We should ask ourselves: On the journey of life, do I seek the way forward? Or am I satisfied with living in the moment and thinking only of feeling good, solving some problems and having fun? What is the path? Is it the search for health, which many today say comes first but which eventually passes? Could it be possessions and wellbeing? But we are not in the world for this. *Return to me*, says the Lord. To *me*. The Lord is the goal of our journey in this world. The direction must lead to him.”

The Pope cited the Gospel, pointing to three steps for the faithful to undertake during Lent “without hypocrisy and pretense: almsgiving, prayer, fasting.” The Holy Father explained:

“Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting bring us back to the three realities that do not fade away. Prayer reunites us to God; charity, to our neighbour; fasting, to ourselves. God, my neighbour, my life: these are the realities that do not fade away and in which we must invest.

“Lent, therefore, invites us to focus, first of all *on the Almighty*, in prayer, which frees us from that horizontal and mundane life where we find time for *self* but forget God. It then invites us to focus *on others*, with the charity that frees us from the vanity of acquiring and of thinking that things are only good if they are good for me. Finally, Lent invites us to *look inside our heart*, with fasting, which frees us from attachment to things and from the worldliness that numbs the heart. Prayer, charity, fasting: three investments for a treasure that endures.”