



LISTEN TO HIM

A LENTEN PASTORAL NOTE BY
ARCHBISHOP SAMUEL J. AQUILA

Dear brothers and sisters,

Each year, the Church provides us with the season of Lent as a time of deeper conversion, deeper intimacy and friendship with Jesus Christ. We are invited into this relationship through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to grow in the virtue of charity, the love of God and of our neighbor.

In the Gospel, Jesus gives us the invitation, “**Come to me**, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and **learn from me**, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (emphasis added, Mt 11:28-30).

Amid the confusion and turmoil in the world and in the Church, we are invited to come to and learn from Jesus. He is our Teacher who becomes Lord of our lives as we learn from him. In imitating him, we let go of our self-centeredness and sin and allow our hearts, will, thoughts and minds to conform to his.

The faithful often ask me, “How do we do this?” Lent is a perfect time to begin this life-long journey. We must start with prayer. We know on a human level that to grow in friendship means to take time with another person, to talk to the person. Prayer does this on a spiritual level with Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, especially praying with the Scripture and/or in Eucharistic adoration.

This Lent, I encourage you to take at least 15 minutes of silent time each day to pray with Jesus. You can do more if you desire and can find the time. Some of you may already do that; others may even take a half-hour or full hour or go to adoration once or twice a week. Everyone’s schedule is different, so do not compare yourself to others. The important thing is to prioritize a period of time each day to spend with Jesus, to share your heart with him and to listen and learn from him.

During the 15-minute period, you may simply read a chapter of the Gospel. I suggest you begin with Mark’s Gospel, as it is the briefest and easiest. Pray to the Holy Spirit before you start. A simple cry of the heart, “Come Holy Spirit, help me to listen.” “Jesus, teach me as I listen to you.” “Jesus, help me to learn from you.” Then read and note where the words of the Gospel are speaking to your heart.

Another form of prayer you can pray in 15 minutes is the Surrender Novena, taking one day at a time during the prayer period for nine days and then starting over and repeating it throughout Lent. Once again, note the words in the prayer that strike your heart and ask Jesus why they stand out to you. How is the Lord speaking to you?

If you have not yet watched *The Chosen*, I encourage you to do so. You may want to take one episode a day beginning with Season One. While they do take liberties with some of the Gospel stories, the stories they create are credible, and do not contradict the Gospel. You can ponder what it may have been like to be a disciple of Jesus 24/7; living with him, listening to him, confused by some of the things he said, and led to the truth, to him who is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). You can see how he loves his disciples, corrects them and calls them to conversion through his mercy.

Another way we encounter Jesus is through the sacraments, most especially in the Eucharist and in Confession. If it has been a long time or even years since you have been to confession, I encourage you to “be not afraid” and return to the regular celebration of this sacrament in your life. Confession is a wonderful way to encounter the tenderness and mercy of Jesus, to break out of the habits of sin, and grow in charity. Some of you may want to consider going to daily Mass, or Mass at least two or three times a week. Be sure after Communion to spend time learning from Jesus and sharing with him your gratitude, wounds, brokenness or questions you may have. Speak heart to heart with Jesus!

Turning to fasting, too, is a powerful means of growing in relationship with God. Fasting helps you turn your heart towards God, to grow in humility and trust in him. It is a sign of repentance and of the desire to depend on God to overcome temptations and vices. There are many examples of fasting in Scripture that have distinct meanings and purpose. David fasted as a sign of his repentance from the grave sins he committed as king.

Almsgiving, as well, strengthens our union with God, especially when done quietly and with gestures of charity towards those who are most in need. This includes giving not only of your wealth to the poor and those in need, but more importantly, of your presence and time. Whether it is visiting those who are sick or in prison, clothing the naked or feeding those who hunger and thirst, all are acts of charity that help you grow in the virtue of charity, loving God and your neighbor. I encourage you to participate in the lunches in the park that Christ in the City does each week or volunteer with Catholic Charities to help those in need.

My deepest hunger and longing for you as your shepherd and Father this Lent is that you come to know and receive the love and mercy of Jesus Christ; that Jesus, who calls us friends, may become your friend as you receive him in your heart and live with him each hour of the day. Remember his invitation. He is waiting for your response. **“Come to me” and “learn from me!”**

To volunteer with Christ in the City, please visit christinthecity.org. To see the wide range of volunteer opportunities available with Catholic Charities, please visit ccdenver.org/volunteer.