



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The entire world has been through a difficult, if not devastating, year!

We would do well to take the advice Pope Francis offers us for Lent this year. He says, “[in] Lent, may we be increasingly concerned with ‘speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation, and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn’ (Fratelli Tutti, 223). In order to give hope to others, it is sometimes enough simply to **be kind**, to be ‘willing to set everything else aside to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference’ (ibid., 224)” (Lenten Message, 2).

Wise advice from our Holy Father! Be kind to one another. We have all been through a lot, and, as the experts remind us, this pandemic is not over. It has been a difficult journey, one in which we have all encountered rough seas. While some have weathered the storm in the safety of a large, sturdy ship, others have roughed the seas in dinghies and rafts. Acts of kindness, large and small, shine the light of hope through the darkness and reassure us that we are not on this journey alone.

And that is what Lent offers us in this year of continued pandemic: **Hope**. It is Christ Jesus who is our hope (cf. 1Tm 1:1). In Jesus Christ risen, we gain strength and hope in a difficult journey. In Lent, we are invited to journey ever more closely with Christ, who is always with us. We do so through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

In **prayer**, we dialogue with Jesus: we pour out our heart to him, and we listen to his words of comfort. We are consoled by his presence. **Fasting** makes our relationship with Jesus quite real and helps us be in solidarity with those who are in need. As a pastor, I have encountered so many parents who sacrifice quietly for their children as a matter of course. They do so, not because we Christians like to suffer. Rather, when we love someone, we don’t think twice about making sacrifices for them. Likewise, it is essential that our love for Christ not remain simply an idea, but that it be concrete, symbolically sharing what we give up with others. This is **almsgiving!** Something that genuinely pleases God: when we reach out to those in need— acting in kindness and giving hope!

In this Lent, as Pope Francis encourages us, let us bring hope to others through simple gestures of kindness, “words of comfort,” and through our daily practice of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. As we journey with Jesus through the desert these 40 days of Lent, we do so as a community of faith. Thus, we will “journey together in hope!”

With my prayers for you this Lent!

+Oscar Cantu