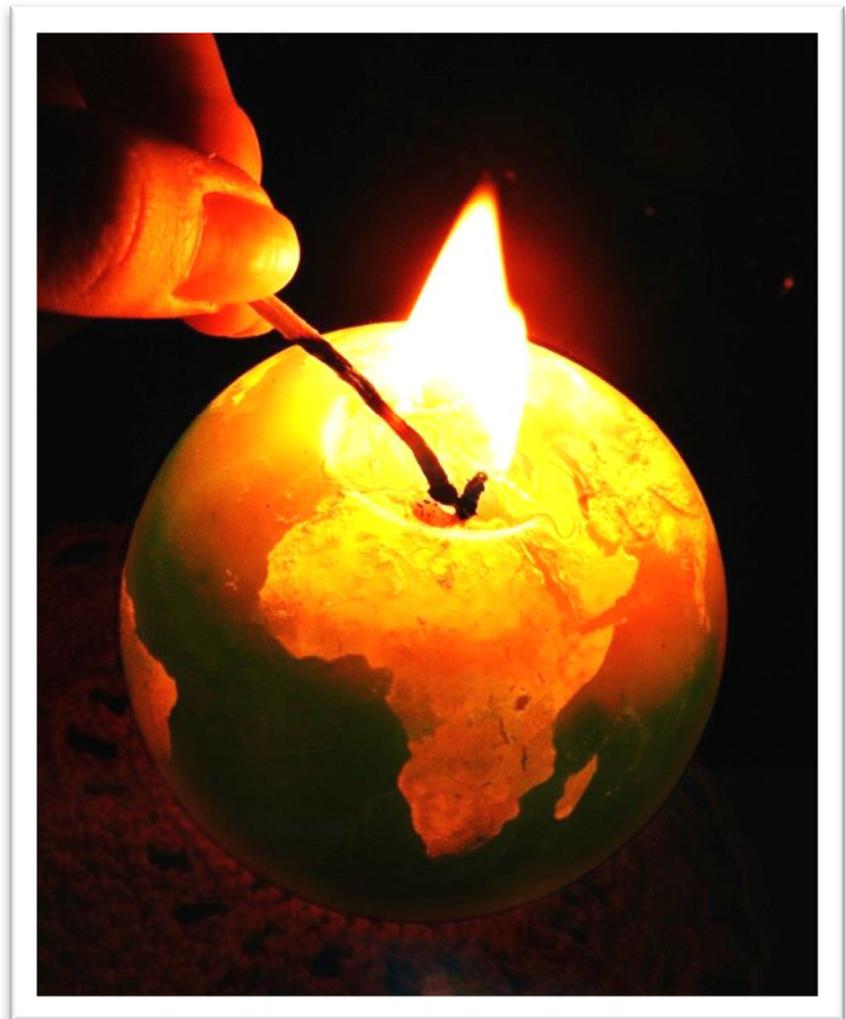


2015

## A Dominican Convent School's Journey through Lent

Reflections and prayers for Lent

# Light a fire in the heart of the World

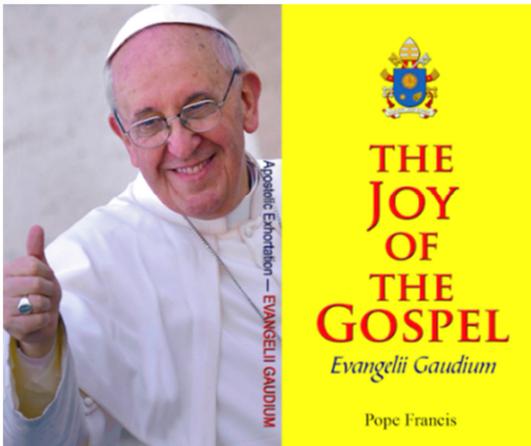


**'Anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out'**

Dominican Convent School



## ABOUT THE THEME: **LIGHT A FIRE IN THE HEART OF THE WORLD**



Our Lenten theme for 2015 is based on Pope Francis's call to every Christian to become a missionary disciple in his remarkable *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel). This important document is perhaps the most inspiring and challenging of our time. It is full of enthusiasm, love, truth, hope and joy. Its consistency with Holy Scripture makes it a

significant, forceful, timeless, reliable, inviting and inspiring document.

*Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel) is divided into five chapters. Each chapter provides for a fruitful Lenten reflection for each week of Lent. For example, in the second chapter, *Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment*, which deals with the challenges of the modern world and the temptations facing evangelisers, Pope Francis calls for true discernment and to guard against the 'empty pleasures of complacency and self-indulgence' (paragraph 95). We encourage everyone to use it as a spiritual guide during the season of Lent, 2015.

The fifth chapter, *Spirit-filled Evangelisers*, is of particular importance to our reflection, not only because our theme is directly taken from it, but also for its content. It emphasises 'personal encounter with the saving love of Christ' and 'a deep breath of prayer' (262). These two themes are consistent with Lent. In this season of Lent, let us hearken to the Holy Father as he 'invites all Christians, everywhere to a renewed personal encounter with Christ; and to do this unfailingly every day' (3).

Finally, in this season of Lent, we are invited to be 'Spirit-filled evangelizers, fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit' (259), to



give witness to the love of Christ by being overflowing springs that drink from the heart of Jesus and to '**LIGHT A FIRE IN THE HEART OF THE WORLD**' (271): A fire of hope, of discernment and understanding, of zeal for God, of truth, of commitment and self-sacrifice.

## Hurray it is Lent again!

*Let's Celebrate!* Indeed, let us celebrate because Lent is not about doom and gloom. It is more than a time of fasting; it can be a season of feasting. We can use Lent to fast from bitterness, self-concern, discouragement, suspicion, anger and hostility, gossip and idleness; and **feast** on compassion, hope, truth, purposefulness, love, patience, passion for God, trust, scripture, fidelity, forgiveness and prayer.



Lent is also a journey rich with opportunities for new life' true freedom, forgiveness from God, inner peace, and spiritual growth. God's love is extravagant, no strings attached, no need to earn it or fear losing it.

Traditionally, Lent is understood as a period of 40 days of penitential preparation for Easter. During lent, we experience an urgent call to repentance. It is a 40 day period following Christ's 40 day fast in the desert.

The number 40 appears many times in the Bible on different special occasions: The Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the desert; prophet Elijah spent a lonely 40 days journeying to Mt Sinai; Moses spent 40 days on Sinai in the presence of God; Noah's Ark was rained upon for 40 days and 40 nights; the people of Nineveh fasted for 40 days after Jonah had carried God's warning to them. The number 40, symbolises a time of incubation or preparation for a great event: The big Event is the Miracle of Easter. Simply put, without Easter, the Church could not have taken roots. It is a symbol of prosperity, and of new life. Christ defeated the Enemy and set us free from the chains of sin and death, poverty and sickness.



## The right attitude for this season of Lent

Let us celebrate this season of lent like never before. Let us hearken to the call of our beloved Pope, to become '*missionary disciples*', keeping in mind that '*an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral*' (10). Let us help others to experience the *Joy of the Gospel*; the joy of knowing Christ.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each community and every believer. Above all it is a "time of grace" (2 Cor 6:2). God does not ask of us anything that he himself has not first given us. "We love because he first has loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). He is not aloof from us. Each one of us has a place in his heart. He knows us by name, he cares for us and he seeks us out whenever we turn away from him. He is interested in each of us; his love does not allow him to be indifferent to what happens to us. Usually, when we are healthy and comfortable, we forget about others (something God the Father never does): we are unconcerned with their problems, their sufferings and the injustices they endure... Our heart grows cold. As long as I am relatively healthy and comfortable, I don't think about those less well off. Today, this selfish attitude of indifference has taken on global proportions, to the extent that we can speak of a globalization of indifference. It is a problem which we, as Christians, need to confront.

When the people of God are converted to his love, they find answers to the questions that history continually raises. One of the most urgent challenges which I would like to address in this Message is precisely the globalization of indifference.

Indifference to our neighbour and to God also represents a real temptation for us Christians. Each year during Lent we need to hear once more the voice of the prophets who cry out and trouble our conscience.

God is not indifferent to our world; he so loves it that he gave his Son for our salvation. In the Incarnation, in the earthly life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, the gate between God and man, between heaven and earth, opens once for all. The Church is like the hand holding open this gate, thanks to her proclamation of God's word, her celebration of the sacraments and her witness of the faith which works through love (cf. Gal 5:6). But the world tends to withdraw into itself and shut that door through which God comes into the world and the world comes to him. Hence the hand, which is the Church, must never be surprised if it is rejected, crushed and wounded.

God's people, then, need this interior renewal, lest we become indifferent and withdraw into ourselves. To further this renewal, I would like to propose for our reflection three biblical texts.

## 1. “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Cor 12:26) – The Church

The love of God breaks through that fatal withdrawal into ourselves which is indifference. The Church offers us this love of God by her teaching and especially by her witness. But we can only bear witness to what we ourselves have experienced. Christians are those who let God clothe them with goodness and mercy, with Christ, so as to become, like Christ, servants of God and others. This is clearly seen in the liturgy of Holy Thursday, with its rite of the washing of feet. Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet, but he came to realize that Jesus does not wish to be just an example of how we should wash one another's feet. Only those who have first allowed Jesus to wash their own feet can then offer this service to others. Only they have “a part” with him (Jn 13:8) and thus can serve others.

Lent is a favourable time for letting Christ serve us so that we in turn may become more like him. This happens whenever we hear the word of God and receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. There we become what we receive: the Body of Christ. In this body there is no room for the indifference which so often seems to possess our hearts. For whoever is of Christ, belongs to one body, and in him we cannot be indifferent to one another. “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honoured, all the parts share its joy” (1 Cor 12:26).

The Church is the *communio sanctorum* not only because of her saints, but also because she is a communion in holy things: the love of God revealed to us in Christ and all his gifts. Among these gifts there is also the response of those who let themselves be touched by this love. In this communion of saints, in this sharing in holy things, no one possesses anything alone, but shares everything with others. And since we are united in God, we can do something for those who are far distant, those whom we could never reach on our own, because with them and for them, we ask God that all of us may be open to his plan of salvation.

## 2. “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9) – Parishes and Communities

All that we have been saying about the universal Church must now be applied to the life of our parishes and communities. Do these ecclesial structures enable us to experience being part of one body? A body which receives and shares what God wishes to give? A body which acknowledges and cares for its weakest, poorest and most insignificant members? Or do we take refuge in a universal love that would embrace the whole world, while failing to see the Lazarus sitting before our closed doors (Lk 16:19-31)?

In order to receive what God gives us and to make it bear abundant fruit, we need to press beyond the boundaries of the visible Church in two ways: In the first place, by

uniting ourselves in prayer with the Church in heaven. The prayers of the Church on earth establish a communion of mutual service and goodness which reaches up into the sight of God. Together with the saints who have found their fulfilment in God, we form part of that communion in which indifference is conquered by love. The Church in heaven is not triumphant because she has turned her back on the sufferings of the world and rejoices in splendid isolation. Rather, the saints already joyfully contemplate the fact that, through Jesus' death and resurrection, they have triumphed once and for all over indifference, hardness of heart and hatred. Until this victory of love penetrates the whole world, the saints continue to accompany us on our pilgrim way. Saint Therese of Lisieux, a Doctor of the Church, expressed her conviction that the joy in heaven for the victory of crucified love remains incomplete as long as there is still a single man or woman on earth who suffers and cries out in pain: "I trust fully that I shall not remain idle in heaven; my desire is to continue to work for the Church and for souls" (Letter 254, July 14, 1897).

We share in the merits and joy of the saints, even as they share in our struggles and our longing for peace and reconciliation. Their joy in the victory of the Risen Christ gives us strength as we strive to overcome our indifference and hardness of heart.

In the second place, every Christian community is called to go out of itself and to be engaged in the life of the greater society of which it is a part, especially with the poor and those who are far away. The Church is missionary by her very nature; she is not self-enclosed but sent out to every nation and people.

Her mission is to bear patient witness to the One who desires to draw all creation and every man and woman to the Father. Her mission is to bring to all a love which cannot remain silent. The Church follows Jesus Christ along the paths that lead to every man and woman, to the very ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8). In each of our neighbours, then, we must see a brother or sister for whom Christ died and rose again. What we ourselves have received, we have received for them as well. Similarly, all that our brothers and sisters possess is a gift for the Church and for all humanity.

Dear brothers and sisters, how greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference!

### 3. “Make your hearts firm!” (James 5:8) – Individual Christians

As individuals too, we are tempted by indifference. Flooded with news reports and troubling images of human suffering, we often feel our complete inability to help. What can we do to avoid being caught up in this spiral of distress and powerlessness?

**First, we can pray in communion with the Church on earth and in heaven.** Let us not underestimate the power of so many voices united in prayer! The 24 Hours for the Lord initiative, which I hope will be observed on 13-14 March throughout the Church, also at the diocesan level, is meant to be a sign of this need for prayer.

**Second, we can help by acts of charity,** reaching out to both those near and far through the Church’s many charitable organizations. Lent is a favourable time for showing this concern for others by small yet concrete signs of our belonging to the one human family.

**Third, the suffering of others is a call to conversion,** since their need reminds me of the uncertainty of my own life and my dependence on God and my brothers and sisters. If we humbly implore God’s grace and accept our own limitations, we will trust in the infinite possibilities which God’s love holds out to us. We will also be able to resist the diabolical temptation of thinking that by our own efforts we can save the world and ourselves.

As a way of overcoming indifference and our pretensions to self-sufficiency, I would invite everyone to live this Lent as an opportunity for engaging in what Benedict XVI called a formation of the heart (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 31). A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters. And, ultimately, a poor heart, one which realizes its own poverty and gives itself freely for others.

During this Lent, then, brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord: “*Fac cor nostrum secundum cor tuum*”: Make our hearts like yours (Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). In this way we will receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalization of indifference.

It is my prayerful hope that this Lent will prove spiritually fruitful for each believer and every ecclesial community. I ask all of you to pray for me. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady keep you.

From the Vatican, 4 October 2014, Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, FRANCIS

**Light a fire in the Heart of the World**

Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

“Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them;”

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, a Holy Day of obligation, of fasting and abstinence. Ash Wednesday is observed with a ceremony in which the priest marks each person with a cross on their foreheads. The cross is made up of two lines or bars; one horizontal, one vertical.

Some people say the vertical bar represents our link, our dialogue, and our relationship with God, while the horizontal bar represents our link with people and the world around us. This, of course, is the representation of the Great Commandment as well as the summary of Pope Francis’



*Evangelii Gaudium* or Joy of the Gospel: To love God with all our heart, mind and strength and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

When we try to keep both relationships going well, a creative tension is produced that is the cross. It is not always easy, but is ultimately the only way to the eternal joy.

**Action:**

Perform deliberate actions that may strengthen your relationship with God and others such as receiving a sacrament of reconciliation and seeking to mend relationships with people that have otherwise been distant from you due to hurt, betrayal and rejection.

**Prayer:**

Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace. Amen

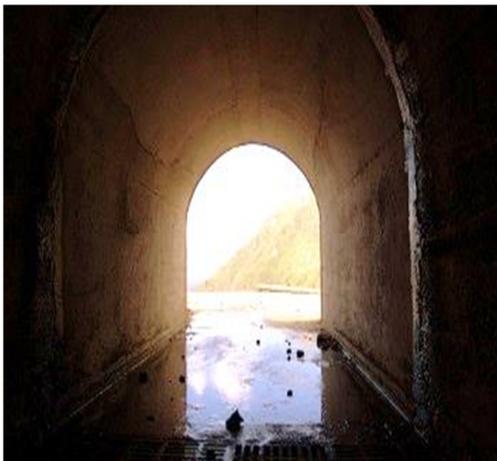
**Light a fire of Hope**

Mark 1:12-15

“He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him”

This short scripture text is full of paradox. The first paragraph speaks about Jesus being among wild beast and angles at the same time. In the second paragraph, Jesus appears after John’s imprisonment, preaching the same message that led to John’s imprisonment: Repentance.

This paradox of mission and persecution, of death and life, and wild beasts and angels can only be understood through faith. Faith in Jesus Christ can fill us with



*‘Gospel’* hope. Only hope *‘born of the loving heart of Jesus Christ’* (183), can give



us courage to stand firm even in the face of the wild beasts of crime, abuse, poverty, corruption, war, diseases, hunger and unemployment. It is this *Gospel Hope* that we are called to preach to others throughout this first week of Lent.

Action:

- Uplift others by sharing a testimony of how you remained hopeful even in the most challenging difficulties.
- Bring ‘Gospel hope’ to others by taking part in the acts of charity.

Prayer:

O my God, relying on Your almighty power, infinite mercy and promises, I hope to obtain pardon for my sins, the help of your grace, and the life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer. Amen

**Light a fire of Discernment and Understanding**

Mark 9: 1-10

“So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant”



One often wonders why Jesus would ask his disciples to keep quiet about such big news as the appearance of Moses and Elijah or a spectacular miracle. It is pure logic. Jesus knew that his disciples did not understand what they witnessed. We know that they did not understand Jesus in many circumstances. The last verse of the above scripture tells us that the disciples did not understand what rising from the dead meant. Jesus would later send the Holy Spirit to enlighten their minds.



But human urges of self-importance encourage us to speak about issues especially if we are the only ones that have some clue. Speaking without full understanding can lead to misunderstanding, failure, error, deception, dishonesty, prejudice and ultimately to war, destruction and loss of life.

This week we are asked “*to let ourselves be penetrated by that word which will also penetrate others*” (150). It is only when the fire of understanding is burning in our own hearts that we are able to light up the world with the fire of discernment.

Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Action:

- Refrain from speaking or acting without full understanding.
- Spend time meditating on the word of God each day of Lent.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, grant us the gift of understanding. Help us to understand the feelings of others, the desires of others. Help me to understand myself in my actions and reactions. Widen my vision beyond my own small world to embrace with knowledge and love the world of others. Help me to always see you at work in my own life and in the lives of others. Amen

**Light a fire of Zeal for God**

John 2:13-25

“Many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing”

This story is embarrassing and yet empowering. It is embarrassing because it is hard to imagine our Lord Jesus embarking on ‘an aggressive crusade’ to defend the house of God. Nevertheless, the story is empowering. There are many temples that need rigorous cleansing: Our families; our nations; our churches; and more importantly, our own personal lives. Money has destroyed many of these temples. We should refuse defilement and fight against any evil in our lives with the same zeal our Lord portrayed. We must let His zeal turn the tables of our complacency, lust, greed, gluttony, disbelief, laziness, materialism and pride so that we may realise our need for God.



It is also interesting to note that John places this reading at the beginning of his gospel while Matthew, Mark and Luke place it at the end of their Gospels leading to the climax of the crucifixion. The three Evangelists use this story to fuel the rage of the Pharisees and intensify their efforts to get Jesus killed. John, on the other hand, uses it to campaign for support for Jesus. In his closing remarks, John tells us, “many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing.” That is, when people saw Jesus’ zeal for the Father, they began to believe in his Name. Let us light the world with the zeal for God, and seeing our love for God, the world will believe in His Name.

**Action:**

- You could help the liturgy team to carry chairs before and after Mass.
- You could also volunteer to lead devotions, or share the Word of God with someone who may need the joy and the truth offered by the Gospels.

**Prayer:**

Oh God, true Temple of life, may Your son Jesus overturn the ‘tables of our complacency and shattered the ‘temples’ of our pride. Build the authentic sign of your Covenant within our hearts. In these days of lent, may the fire of your zeal increase our love and open us to deeper communion with You and all those in need. Amen

**Light a fire of Truth**

John 3:14-21

“But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God”

Many of us find ourselves in the shoes of Nicodemus. Nicodemus believes Jesus is sent from God; however, like for many of us, it is more comfortable to live in darkness, without the cross. He comes to Jesus under the cover of darkness. But time is running out for him: He must make up his mind; he must decide whether to stay in the dark or to be born again and follow Jesus.

We also get the sense of this urgency to decide. It is heightened by the use of contrast throughout the reading. In the first place, John compares the ‘lifting up’ of the serpent in the old covenant with the ‘lifting up’ of the Son of Man. There is a sharp contrast between physical restoration which the world of darkness or the old covenant promises and the never-ending life promised by the new covenant. There are more contrasts in the verses that following:

1. To condemn and to save
2. To believe in the Son of Man and not to believe
3. To stay in darkness and to come into the light
4. To do wicked things and living the truth



We are so truly and continuously invited by God but it is for us to choose, here and now, during Lent! We are privileged that we can come to Jesus and hear the truth, but it should not end with us. We are urged to become missionary disciples and light the world with the fire of God’s truth.

**Action:**

- Donate a candle at your Church or to the needy as a symbol of our eagerness to live in the light of God’s truth.
- Find courage to make your peers aware of the wrongs they do this week.

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, teach us your truth. Help us to believe mightily, hope joyfully, love you divinely. Help us to live in your light so that we may light up the world with the fire of God’s truth, Amen.

**Light a Fire of commitment and self-sacrifice**

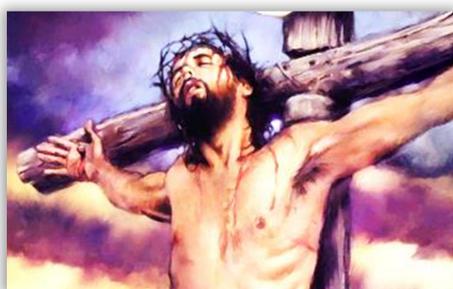
John 12:20-33

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit”

This is one of the mystifying stories of Jesus. Jesus turns away a group of Greek devotees who came to seek the face of God. Jesus’s answer to Andrew and Philip is even more puzzling; whoever loves his life will lose it.

It is interesting to note that the group of Greeks choose to speak to Philip and not the other disciples. It is possible that they chose him, precisely because Philip was from Bethsaida, which was a Greek speaking territory. How many of us are tempted to get a job through someone we know? This is a seed of corruption and nepotism. There is no doubt that Jesus knew the intentions of the Greeks.

Jesus is letting us know that asking to see Jesus or asking to hear his word, joining in fellowship every Sunday at church or wearing Christian symbols does not necessarily mean that we are committed to our faith. We must be willing to lay down our lives with Christ.



Jesus challenges us to explode into the fire of commitment and self-sacrifice; to follow him in body and in spirit. We are called to put God before our needs and wants. When we do this, it will be much easier to put others before ourselves; and to put God above all else.

**Action:**

- Think of a sacrifice that you are prepared to make such as giving up your lunch to offer it to someone in need.

**Prayer:**

Dear Lord, I give you my hands to do Your work; my feet to go Your way; my eyes to see as You see; my tongue to speak Your words. Above all, I give You my heart that You may love in me. I give you my whole self so that it is You who lives, works and prays in me. Amen

**Light a Fire of Love**

Mark: 1-15, 47

“Truly this man was the Son of God”

The saying that, “*when days are dark, friends are few*” is true in this story. Jesus is alone. All his followers are powerless. They cannot help him. Others were **indifferent**, while others had rejected him. It was only when it was all over that some of them began to realise that, “Truly this man was the Son of God.”



So too, our love must be tested by the cross. We can no longer keep quiet at injustice. This is our beloved Pope Francis' message for Lent 2015. He teaches us that “*Lent is a favourable time for showing concern for others by small yet concrete signs of our belonging to the one human family.*” We light a fire of mercy in the heart of the World this Lenten season.

“Dear brothers and sisters, how greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference! Pope Francis.

**Prayer:**

Lord, we are your people, the sheep of your flock. Heal the sheep who are wounded, touch the sheep who are in pain, clean the sheep who are soiled, warm the lambs who are cold. Help us to know the Father's love through Jesus the shepherd and through his Spirit. Help us to lift up that love, and show it all over this land. Help us to build love on justice and justice on love. Help us to believe mightily, hope joyfully, love divinely. Renew us that we may renew the face of the earth. Amen