



Dear Sisters,

I would like to begin our reflection for this Lent by quoting what Pope Francis appropriately said during the Lent of 2015, “God’s mercy transforms human hearts. It enables us through the experience of a faithful love, to become merciful in turn”.

Even though every morning is a new beginning for us, Lent has a special significance to begin anew all over, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter - Christ’s victory over death – to our own victory over our weaknesses. The season of Lent is designated by the Church to make an urgent call to conversion for its believers. We are asked to return to God, ‘with all our heart’ (Joel 2: 12) and again as Pope Francis has just said, “to refuse to settle for mediocrity and grow in friendship with the Lord”.

It is this time of the year when the Church enters into a period of fast, abstinence, almsgiving and prayer asking the faithful to do the same. Many Catholics/communities take upon different practices of self-renunciation, fasting, prayer and almsgiving during this period, also a special period of grace.

With this background in mind, I am reflecting as to what would be specific for us as communities of Apostolic Carmel that would challenge us and set us aside as special people moving in the direction to achieve all that Lent is supposed to mean to us so that we too could experience victory on Easter night.

It strikes me and what I would like to focus, on is the fact of the transforming and life giving persons that we are called to be in our special vocation. In my recent interaction with communities and individual members, I realised that one important aspect that we are called to be is, to make God’s love tangible in the lives of those we come across and thus become life giving and life saving. We don’t probably always see it immediately, as we often get blinded by our self-centeredness and preoccupation with our day to day routine activities, or are caught up with our perhaps deep-seated hurts and unresolved issues.

Do we realize that it is largely due to lack of communication that we fail to notice that people around us have mini shipwrecks every day? For example when a child fails in school or his/her parents are not well or are poor; a co-worker makes mistaken choices landing her in trouble; a sister is hurt by another one and is simply stuck there unable to rise out of it or go beyond and see the larger picture! Isn’t that a reality we face in our daily life? And what do we then do about it?

I believe that the lifeline we have to offer flows mostly through words, at least as the first step. Every word we speak has the power either to give new strength and life to a sagging spirit or to destroy a little bit of the flickering spirit and vitality. We have the wonderful capacity to offer acceptance, love and hope or we also have the ability to judge, condemn and make a deeper wound through those disastrous words that escape our lips.

We can best understand this in **the story of Jesus with a Woman and a bunch of stone throwers (John 8: 1 – 11)** which I came across while reading the book: “Everybody’s Normal till you get to know them”, by John Ortberg.

Like the paralytic she is taken to Jesus by a band of men while he is teaching a crowd. Only she is not carried on a mat but is wrapped up in sheets. The men who bring her are not her friends but enemies. She is brought not to be healed but to be killed. Jesus had just sat down to teach the people. In those days the way a Rabbi signalled that formal teaching time had begun, was by sitting down. Then Jesus bends down and starts writing in the sand. This act of writing bothers the stone throwers. Jesus confronts those men with a decision, “Go ahead and throw the stone but make sure first, that the one who throws the stone is himself without sin“. Jesus then turns round to the woman and asks, “Where are the stone throwers?” Has no one condemned you? “No one sir”, she replies and Jesus, says “Neither do I condemn you”. But that is not all. He also firmly adds, “Go and sin no more!” Jesus’ acceptance is free, unreserved but it is also demanding. For the woman to fully understand this, acceptance will make her enter into a new way of life.

In this whole incident another interesting thing to observe is how the stone throwers who came all prepared to kill the woman, slowly but steadily let go of their stones. They had held them firmly to wound and destroy another individual, who, from their self-righteous attitude deserved neither understanding nor forgiveness. Jesus, however, helped them to reflect about their own weaknesses and sinfulness, about them being as human as that vulnerable woman caught in adultery. Jesus did it gently, without lecturing to them or throwing stones at them.

What we could probably, fruitfully reflect during this Lent - a special time of grace, is: Do I have stones too that I am tightly holding on to, which actually knowingly or unknowingly, hurt others? And is Jesus asking me gently to let go off those stones?

Having done that, the next step could be to reflect on, if we are happy just to survive or exist in religious life and be mediocre or are we ready to put down the stone which will require of us to step out from our space and take the first step to go to the person whom we have hurt or who has hurt us, either through gossip or unkind words or by just not relating to her/him.

And above all, can we develop a habit of simply being positive in all kinds of situations, so that kind and loving words spring out of our lips at the place of work? Would that not make a big difference to our sisters, staff and students and in the manner we relate to our co-workers? And would such a practice not be really life-giving, awe-inspiring, exactly the thing Jesus did for that woman and what we as religious in the Apostolic Carmel are called to do?

I wish you all a reflective season of Lent.

My team and I wish you Peace and Joy of the Risen Lord!!

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