



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

ANGELUS

St Peter's Square

First Sunday of Lent, 10 February 2008

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Last Wednesday, we entered Lent with fasting and the Rite of Ashes. But what does "entering Lent" mean? It means we enter a season of special commitment in the spiritual battle to oppose the evil present in the world, in each one of us and around us. It means looking evil in the face and being ready to fight its effects and especially its causes, even its primary cause which is Satan. It means not off-loading the problem of evil on to others, on to society or on to God but rather recognizing one's own responsibility and assuming it with awareness. In this regard Jesus' invitation to each one of us Christians to take up our "cross" and follow him with humility and trust (cf. Mt 16: 24) is particularly pressing. Although the "cross" may be heavy it is not synonymous with misfortune, with disgrace, to be avoided on all accounts; rather it is an opportunity to follow Jesus and thereby to acquire strength in the fight against sin and evil. Thus, entering Lent means renewing the personal and community decision to face evil together with Christ. The way of the Cross is in fact the only way that leads to the victory of love over hatred, of sharing over selfishness, of peace over violence. Seen in this light, Lent is truly an opportunity for a strong ascetic and spiritual commitment based on Christ's grace.

This year the beginning of Lent providentially coincides with the 150th anniversary of the Apparitions in Lourdes. Four years after the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception by Blessed Pius IX, Mary appeared to St Bernadette Soubirous for the first time on 11 February 1858 in the Grotto of Massabielle. Another three Apparitions accompanied by extraordinary events followed in succession and finally the Blessed Virgin took her leave of the young seer, in the local dialect, by disclosing to her: "I am the Immaculate Conception". The

message that Our Lady continues to spread in Lourdes recalls the words that Jesus spoke at the very beginning of his public mission, which we hear several times during these days of Lent: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel", pray and do penance. Let us accept Mary's invitation which echoes Christ's and ask her to obtain for us that we may "enter" Lent with faith, to live this season of grace with inner joy and generous commitment.

Let us also entrust to the Virgin the sick and all who take loving care of them. Indeed, the World Day of the Sick will be celebrated tomorrow, the Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes. I wholeheartedly greet the pilgrims who will be gathering in St Peter's Basilica, led by Cardinal Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care. Unfortunately I shall not be able to meet them because this evening I will begin Spiritual Exercises, but in silence and recollection I will pray for them and for all the needs of the Church and of the world. To all who desire to remember me to the Lord, I offer my sincere thanks from this moment.

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### **After the Angelus:**

I warmly greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Angelus. I particularly welcome members of the Hohenfels Catholic Military Faith Community from the United States of America, as well as young people from the Sant'Egidio Community in Asia and Oceania who are attending a formation course in Rome. My dear friends, this past week we began our Lenten practice of prayer, fasting, and - in a special way - almsgiving. I invite all believers to enter this "spiritual battle" with hearts full of generosity towards those in need. In this way, we learn to make our lives a total gift to God and to our brothers and sisters. I wish you all a fruitful preparation for the Paschal Feast!

I wish you all a good Sunday and a rewarding Lenten season.

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