

# INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF CATHOLIC KNIGHTS

*Apostles of the Third Millennium*

Dear members of the International Alliance of Catholic Knights,

Once again, the solemnity of the death and resurrection of the Lord draws near! In our preparation for Easter, the Church and God in his providence offer us each year the season of Lent as a preparation for Easter and a "sacramental sign of our conversion".<sup>1</sup> Lent summons us, and enables us, to come back to the Lord wholeheartedly and in every aspect of our life.

As we have entered this Lenten season, I would like to bring a few thoughts for our reflection and consideration. The words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew may be a good starting point for our reflection; "Because of the increase of iniquity, the love of many will grow cold" (24:12).

These words appear in Christ's preaching about the end of time. Each Lent is the anticipation of the end of time for us because in Lent we focus on how salvation was accomplished. If you have watched Mel Gibson's THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST, you will understand how Jesus really suffered to have you and I saved.

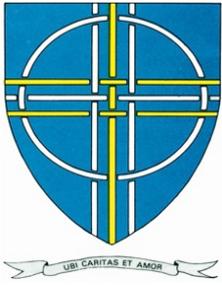
It is how he really went through his passion and suffering that compels us to question ourselves how much we love and appreciate what he went through. The Prophet Isaiah had prophesied that he would be torched beyond human recognition (Is. 52:13—53:1-12).

It is easy for our hearts to grow cold towards Christ and our salvation. What are the signs that our love is beginning to grow cold? More than anything else, what destroys our love is greed and selfishness. We prefer to hold on to ourselves and what we have and even crave for more; selfishness and spiritual sloth, pessimism and the temptation to self-absorption, constant warming ourselves and the worldly mentality that make us too concerned about our appearances. We do not have time for anybody except the self. This is the time to ask ourselves how charitable we are, with ourselves, our time, what we have and the like.

Lent therefore, is a universal call to all of us to reform, repent and renew our lives by resolving to live more in keeping with the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Lent always comes close enough to the spring-time of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, making it a season of optimism and new hope.

For many of us, life itself is an embodiment of contradictions: love and hatred, strength and weaknesses, humility and pride, truth and falsehood, direction and chaos, life and death. All of these can be weighing so heavily on us. Each of us in some part of life, finds something upsetting that robs us of the full effects of the redemption won for us in Christ Jesus. So Lent invites us to return to God and be reconciled with him in such a way that our relationship with him will remain intimate and lasting, and so have a very positive reflection on our relationship with our neighbours. We all have to accept that our relationship with God and our neighbours has not always been good enough, and hence the need to return to God and our neighbours with hearts broken. Lent therefore, is the 'acceptable time....the day of salvation'(2Cor 6:2) to 'return to the Lord with all our hearts' (Joel 2:12).

The ancient practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving are recommended for our personal and community growth spiritually. However, they must be undertaken for the right spiritual reason. For example, our prayer must help keep us in communion with God. To let us talk to God at all times. It must make us realize that God is like a good father, and ever ready to listen to us. Our fasting must



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help us improve our interior life. The Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV has encouraged us to fast on idle talk, anger and the like, this Lent. Our fasting should weaken our tendency to be selfish. It should allow us to put ourselves in the shoes of those who do not eat to their fullest satisfaction. It should express our spiritual hunger and thirst for God in our lives. It should wake us up and make us more attentive to God and our neighbours. In the end, it must revive our desire to obey God who alone is capable of satisfying our innermost longings.

Our almsgiving must lead us to recognize Christ in others, leading us to perform works of mercy and practice justice in our dealings with our neighbours. Sometimes it takes only a kind word to another to express our charity. When we give alms we share in God's providential care. If through us God helps someone today, tomorrow he will not only provide for our own needs alone but for others as well. What we save by fasting is to be offered to the hungry as almsgiving.

These are Lenten opportunities. Beyond these traditional practices, many other devotions and spiritual projects can be pursued. We might resolve to forgive an enemy or assist an unfortunate person and those who need our help.

So, where are you this Lent? Do you want more than what you have? Start with this: it is not about us and what we can do. It is about a relationship. In this relationship, God gave us everything. Jesus gave up his life for our hearts. Maybe we are putting energy toward hiding something, like our sins. Imagine that this Lent you can be freed from whatever that may be. There are many chains in which a heart can be tangled, but Christ is the only one strong enough to break all of them. Instead of putting energy toward trying to break these chains, give your heart to God as a sacrifice this Lent. The word "sacrifice" comes from the Latin words "sacer" (sacred) and "facere" (to make), so it essentially means to make something sacred. It means offering something to God so he can make it holy. What is God calling you to sacrifice this Lent? It is said that, "if you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you always got." So think about offering something different to God this Lent, because God wants more for you. Lent is for those who need a savior, forgiveness, and mercy. It's a chance to grow in the most important relationship we can have; with the God of the universe and our neighbours.

Just as the season of spring brings cheer to the heart of those who look forward to a time of flowering and growth, so we are invited to approach the season of Lent with a hope of renewal and focus on the opportunities for deepening our relationship with God and our neighbours.

God bless you.

Most. Rev. John Opoku-Agyemang

International Chaplain