

Lent: Bishop of the diocese of Leiria-Fatima presents “Ways of Mercy”

Message released this afternoon

2016 Lent "cannot be just like the past years," for this year we have in our heart the Holy Year of Mercy, says the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima in the message for this Lent, released to all diocesan this Friday.

According to Mgr. António Marto, this coincidence "requires an appropriate answer from us" in order to follow the path of the forty days preparing Easter, as Pope Francis suggested us, challenging us "to celebrate and experience the mercy of God" in order that life "acquires a spirit and style of mercy”.

Among the proposals for this "walk", the prelate stands up for the listening to the word of God; the celebration of reconciliation sacrament and the practice of works of mercy.

“We have to listen to the word of God", because it is the only way “for us to discover the merciful face of the Father, to deepen the richness of mercy and the related attitudes to our lifestyle and relationships."

To this end, the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima reminds the diocesans that they have at their

disposal the popular retreat under the motto "The grace of mercy under the eyes of Mary," which gives an opportunity to discover "the grace of God's mercy that heals the wounds and sins" of each one.

It should be mentioned that the manuscript of this retreat offers six themes, meaning six Lenten meetings: "Maria, singer of the mercy of God" is the first one where one starts to" listen and meditate the Magnificat"; the second theme is "Humbleness and belief in God", from the parable of the Pharisee and the publican in the temple; "The Look that changes life" refers to the story of Zacchaeus.

Then the fourth theme is "The Feast of forgiveness', the return of the prodigal son; the fifth recalls the goodness of Jesus towards the sinful woman in "Forgiveness renews life" and the sixth meeting 'Mary, Mother of Mercy' recalls the moment when "Jesus delivers his mother to the beloved disciple".

From the theme of the Popular Retreat 2016 - 'The grace of mercy under the eyes of Mary", the prelate says that they are going to do it "helped by the merciful heart and eyes of the Mother of the Lord."

In this context, Mgr. António Marto invites the faithful, the families and the communities to "devote themselves to the prayerful reading of the Word of God for a while ", in a group, and repeat this exercise on their own "at least once a week, all the way through Lent".

"Through his Word, Jesus speaks to our heart and cures it of selfishness, sin and indifference," said the diocesan bishop, in the note where he presents the retreat for this Lent.

It should be noted that each meeting was prepared to take about one hour and includes moments of prayer, reading and understanding of the Word of God, personal and common meditation, singing and commitment to lifestyle changes.

In the same way, the initiative "24 hours for the Lord", to be held on March 4th and 5th, "is an opportunity of prayerful listening to the Word in an intense moment of prayer and worship," refers the message of Mgr. Antonio Marto.

Quoting once more the message of Pope Francis, the prelate states that "God's mercy is indeed an announcement to the world, but each Christian must experience such announcement by himself." Hence, "these moments have to be well prepared in order to have quality and the involvement of groups and movements of the communities" and be complemented by the opportunity of the sacrament of reconciliation.

"The valorization of reconciliation sacrament is one of the aspects that should characterize more the spiritual and pastoral renewal of the Year of Mercy," states Mgr. Antonio Marto, emphasizing the importance of putting this sacrament "in the center" because it "allows us to meet the greatness of mercy. This sacrament will be for each penitent a source of true inner peace".

Therefore, "it is necessary to rediscover the importance of this sacrament," says the prelate.

Although all the sacraments "are a sign of God's mercy, the sacrament of penance and reconciliation is the moment and the place in which we experience the compassion of God in the most direct way, more immediate, more intimate and more concrete and we receive the gift of forgiveness, with the formula of absolution", Mgr. António Marto underlines also.

"Before putting the accent on the works of the penitent or the fatigue of confession, we must put it first in the belief in the grace of forgiveness, in what God is able to do in us," states Mgr. also.

Thus, in catechesis and pastoral "one must point out that it is a sacrament of healing and therefore of joy: the joy of forgiveness, of the return to the Father's house, of inner wounds healing, of reconciliation with God and with others, of rediscover and deepen the taste of good, of regain serenity and inner peace, of progressing on the path of conversion, "he says.

"The approach of the ministers of the sacrament - the confessors - must be the one of a father. His first mission is to welcome even those who are in difficult situations: a warm welcome, compassionate, patient and respectful of the dignity and personal history of each penitent ", concludes regarding this.

The diocesan bishop also makes an appeal to the practice of the works of mercy.

"The Lenten season is also an opportunity to live and witness to mercy by means of real signs."

"I suggest that each one of us takes the resolution to perform, throughout Lent, a corporal and spiritual work of mercy," he notified.

The penitential contribution of this Lent, in the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima, is for an initiative of social and economic support, which will be implemented in the diocese through the Diocesan Caritas, for pregnant women in difficulty.

"It is not enough to cry for the plague of abortion; real initiatives to prevent are needed" alerts Mgr. António Marto.

Additionally, the diocesan bishop reminds that, during this Lenten way, the diocesan pilgrimage to Fatima will be on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, on March 13th, "as a sign of walking together as Church with Mary, Mother of Mercy."

As a final point, Mgr. makes an appeal in tune once again with the Holy Father's message: "Let us not lose this Lenten time favorable to conversion" for it is "a time to grow in the listening to the Word, in the acceptance of God's forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation and the exercise of works of mercy to open the eyes and hearts to the poor and those who suffer."

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