

Pause to Pray in February

Take some time to stop and think, to be alone with Jesus, to look at your life a little more honestly.

Before you begin, try to really take care of this period of prayer: set your phone aside or turn off your notifications, grab a notebook, and place yourself in God's presence.

Who has made a difference in your life?

Have you ever seen someone and thought: "This person is genuine: what they say and what they do really match"? That kind of consistency is something we all admire, but it's not always easy to live.

Think about the people who have made a difference in your life. It is probably easy to think of someone who has influenced you by their example: friends, teachers, family members... But if you look a little deeper, you'll realise that the person who has transformed your life the most is Jesus. Even without us realising it, his life and his love have changed the course of history, and our lives too. That's exactly what we celebrate in Lent: that his self-giving wins us a new life.

This is a good moment to discover or rediscover it.

"Each of us, if we cast our minds back, can recall those who have been rays of light in our lives: parents, grandparents, friends, priests, religious men and women, catechists, youth leaders, teachers, and so on. They are the "roots" of our joy. Let each of us now spend a few moments in silence to think of those who have given us something in life, who are like the roots of our joy... Did faces and stories come to mind?" (Pope Francis, World Youth Day Vigil 2023)

Think of two people who've made a difference in your life.

What do you admire most in those people?

- ☐ Their consistency and how they're the same person wherever they go
- ☐ Their courage to do what's right
- ☐ Their sense of direction and how they know what they want
- ☐ Their joy and hope
- ☐ Their readiness to help others and their care for everyone
- ☐ The way they explain and live their values
- ☐ Their ability to admit when they're wrong

How did they impact you?

What do you think when you meet someone consistent and authentic?

We follow a Person, not an idea

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (Pope Benedict XVI, Deus caritas est, no. 1).

We all admire people who are consistent, but it's not always easy to be that way ourselves. Sometimes it's out of embarrassment, sometimes laziness or comfort... Or simply because we're not really sure what (or who) we want to be faithful to.

The apostles shared everything with Jesus. They spent a lot of time with Him. And one day He asked them: “Who do you say that I am?” He's asking you the same question: “Who do you say that I am?” Who is Jesus for you? Why is God important to you? What has he done for you?

One way to get to know Jesus better, and to see how much He loves you, is to look at what He has done (and still does) for you. This is what we try to do during Lent, when we pause to reflect on God's self-giving on the Cross. Jesus is not on the Cross for “everyone” in a vague, general way: He is there for each person, including you.

These words from St. Josemaria might help you go deeper into this idea: ***“So much do I love Christ on the Cross that every crucifix is like a loving reproach from my God: ‘... I suffering, and you... a coward. I loving you, and you forgetting me. I begging you, and you... denying me’ (Way of the Cross).***

What do those words mean to you at this point in your life? Are you generous with Jesus?

“You are discouraged, why? Is it your sins and miseries? Is it your defeats, at times coming one after the other? A really big fall, which you didn't expect? Be simple. Open your heart. Look: as yet nothing has been lost. You can still go forward, and with more love, with more affection, with more strength.

Take refuge in your divine sonship: God is your most loving Father. In this lies your security, a haven where you can drop anchor no matter what is happening on the surface of the sea of life. And you will find joy, strength, optimism: victory!” (Way of the Cross)

When, or in what situations, do you usually feel most frustrated? When you feel defeated, who do you turn to first: God, other people, or do you try to handle it alone?

“Take refuge in your divine sonship.” What does it mean to you that God is your Father?

What situations/habits/people take you a little further from God?

"Coming closer to God means being ready to be converted anew, to change direction again, to listen attentively to his inspirations – those holy desires he places in our souls – and to put them into practice" (The Forge).

Where do you think God is calling you to conversion? What small concrete step could you take today (in your studies, relationships with others, prayer...)?

A life that makes a difference

If you follow Jesus closely, He will want to count on you to bring Him to others, so that each person can discover, as you have, that they are important and loved by God. What you may know now is not so well known to everyone.

As Pope Francis says, ***"Let us never tire of bearing witness to the newness of Jesus. Faith is not a beautiful display of things from the past (that would be a museum), but an ever-present event, the encounter with Christ that takes place in our lives, here and now."***

Do you live your faith as something inherited from the past – from your family or your culture – or as a real, personal encounter with Jesus today? How can you make Jesus present in your daily life?

“The faith is passed on by attraction, by witness” (Pope Francis, Homily, May 2018).

What kind of witness are you giving to others with your life? How can you reflect God’s love in your environment? (Tick what you think you’re already doing or what you want to work on this month.)

- ☐ Standing up for my beliefs in conversations about the Church or about God
- ☐ Stepping away from situations that I know go against my values
- ☐ Looking for ways to grow in my formation and learning to explain what I believe
- ☐ Really praying for the people God has placed in my life
- ☐ Being joyful, because I know God is always looking at me and caring for me
- ☐ Living the sacraments (Holy Communion, Confession) in order to receive God’s help to follow Him
- ☐ Being attentive to others, because Christians should be known for how they love each other

Make a list of people and intentions you can pray for more. This Lent, when something is difficult for you, you can offer it up for them.

Jesus, am I carrying the Cross with You? (a short examination of conscience)

A good way to draw closer to God this Lent is by receiving his forgiveness and love in Confession. These questions could help you prepare:

1. **"I thirst"** → Jesus thirsts for you. How do you treat Him in your daily life? Do you look for moments during the day to greet Him, talk to Him, and tell Him about what's going on in your life?
2. **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"** → Do you know how to ask forgiveness when you hurt others? How long does it take you to forgive?
3. **"Veronica wiped the face of Jesus"** → Are you attentive to others, to what's going on in their lives, to what they might need? Do you "waste time" with and for others, or do you always put your own things first?
4. **"Jesus fell for the third time"** → Where are you struggling now? What habits do you have that pull you away from God (laziness, selfishness, impurity, superficiality, lies...)?
5. **"Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry the Cross"** → Do you tend to complain when things are difficult? Do you offer up small sacrifices in your daily life, or do you always look for comfort? Do you know how to offer others the best (the best slice of cake, the best seat...)?
6. **"Woman, behold your son"** → Are you available to everyone, or only to your friends?
7. **"Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom"** → Do you ask God for help to draw closer to Him, or do you rely only on your own strength? Do you pray for others?
8. **"It is finished"** → Have you been faithful to your commitments to God and to others? What do you spend (or waste) your time on?