

Lenten Letters from Fr Jonathan  
March 24<sup>th</sup>

My dear St Peter's family. I have you close in my heart as I spend these days working from home. I've a lovely room where I say daily Mass and spend time in prayerful study, rosary and other devotions. If all goes well, I just have the symptoms of a minor cold, I should be able to return to St. Peter's on Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Thank you for the kind notes sent my way and for your prayers. In these days, I would like to send you a daily Lenten letter and thereby stay connected with you. In my letter for today I am inspired to share with you a portion of a podcast from Opus Dei. (The complete podcast is available here: <https://stjosemaria.org/podcast-a-wake-up-call-to-conversion/>). In it Fr Javier del Castillo, an Opus Dei priest, who is a part of the Jose Maria Institute, references this passage from Luke 13:1-5:

***There were some present at that very time who told Jesus of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."***

There are two tragedies referred to here, one violent and the other accidental. In both cases, there are those who thought that somehow those who suffered were receiving a type of Divine retribution. Not so says Jesus. What Jesus makes clear is how life in this world is so very precarious and uncertain. A realization that has been brought home to us with an immediacy we have not before experienced in our life time. We could not have anticipated where we would be today, when on February 28<sup>th</sup> we gathered at St. Peter's in such large numbers to begin our Lenten Journey with the imposition of ashes where we heard: "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return".

Today we have an awareness of our vulnerability that is also an invitation to deeper repentance. Twice in this passage Jesus uses the verb "repent" and it means "a change of mind. What Jesus is inviting us to discover that life is not senseless, that is, perishing; but purposeful, when understood in relation to him. This is so especially now, during COVID19 and the economic upheaval associated with it.

Pope Benedict developed this point when in a 2007 Angelus address he spoke of the importance of conversion/repentance this way. Jesus does not propose conversion in legalistic terms, but rather in realistic ones, as the only adequate response to the events that place human certainties in crisis.

In the face of certain disgraces, he warns, it does no good to blame the victims. Rather, true wisdom allows one to question the precariousness of existence and to acquire an attitude of responsibility: to do penance and to improve our lives.

This is wisdom, this is the most effective response to evil on every level: interpersonal, social and international. Christ invites us to respond to evil, first of all, with a serious examination of

conscience and the commitment to purify our lives. Otherwise, he says, we will perish, we will all perish in the same way. In effect, people and societies that live without ever questioning themselves have ruin as their only final destination. Conversion, on the other hand, while not preserving one from problems and misfortunes, allows one to face them in a different "way". First of all, it helps to prevent evil, disengaging some of its threats. And in any case, it allows one to overcome evil with good: if not always on a factual level, which sometimes is independent of our will, certainly on a spiritual level. In summary: *conversion overcomes the root of evil, which is sin, even if it cannot always avoid its consequences.*

May the wise council of Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI inspire us to deeper conversion during this Lenten season.

Let us pray to Mary Most Holy, her chaste Spouse St. Joseph and Jesus, our great High Priest, who accompanies and sustains us so that they may help us to rediscover the greatness and the beauty of conversion.

With my love,

Fr Jonathan