



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's second reading, St. Paul speaks to us about the victory brought about in Jesus Christ:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting? (I Corinthians 15:54b-55)

In the midst of all of the suffering of this life, this is a chant we need to learn in our lives – sin and death have no power over us when we are in the arms of Jesus. This doesn't mean there will be no suffering, but that Jesus has conquered it.

This is the point of why God became man, why Jesus, as the God-man, went to death on the cross and was raised from the dead. Our God took on all of our suffering and death so that He would conquer it. Now, the gates of Heaven are open to us (while it may not be easy to get to Heaven, it is now possible). God becomes one with our humanity so that we can become one with His Divinity!

So often, our lives are controlled by fear. I think about my own life: most often, I don't know why I'm reacting the way I do. It's only afterward when I look back, I recognize a subtle (or not so subtle) fear directing my choices. I don't think I'm alone in this. But the Good News is that God has overcome all of this! No matter what our fear is, God is bigger. When we recognize those fears driving our lives, we can then turn to God and surrender the fear, making a choice to trust in Him. Then we get to cry out "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Lent begins this week, and it is an opportunity to face our sin head on. Jesus' proclamation to repent and believe in the Gospel is a clarion call to turn away from our selfishness and pride, and to turn back to God. The practices of prayer, almsgiving and fasting allow us to face our weakness and surrender our lives more to God.

Prayer recognizes that my time is not really my own, and that I'm not really in charge of my life. I must surrender this to Him. Christian prayer is different from pagan prayer. The pagans try to control and manipulate the spiritual powers of the universe. Christians recognize that we are children of a loving Father. Our prayer is not to change His mind, but to show our love for our Daddy! Almsgiving helps us to overcome our dependence on our own stability and security. It reminds us that there are others who have less than we do... and we could easily be in the same position. It helps us to trust more in God, while opening our hearts in love to those around us. Fasting is a reminder of our mortality. When we feel the ache of hunger, when we experience the longing for a favorite type of food, when we experience weakness from less than the normal caloric intake, we realize that we are only a few meals short of our mortality.

In all of these things, we are reminded that we need to rely on God for all that we are. And we are also reminded that HE HAS CONQUERED ALL OF THIS.

Lent is a time of preparation for Easter – celebrating the Resurrection. As we enter into Lent, may we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who overcame sin, who conquered death, and who still does this today for each of us if we but surrender to Him and His love.