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Lent: 40 Days, 40 Thoughts from the Pope

We offer 40 short excerpts from Benedict XVI's messages for Lent since occupying the chair of Peter, with a link to his Lenten message for this year.

02/25/2009

1. May every family and Christian community use well this time of Lent, in order to cast aside all that distracts the spirit, and grow in whatever nourishes the soul,

increasing love for God and neighbour. I am thinking especially of a greater commitment to prayer, *lectio divina* , recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and active participation in the Eucharist, above all Sunday Mass. (2009)

2. Fasting is a great help to avoid sin and all that leads to it. (2009)

3. True fasting, as the divine Master repeats elsewhere, is rather to do the will of the Heavenly Father, who "sees in secret, and will reward you" (*Mt 6,18*). (2009)

4. If, therefore, Adam disobeyed the Lord's command, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat," the believer, through fasting, intends to submit himself humbly to God, trusting in His goodness and mercy. (2009)

5. Fasting certainly bring benefits to physical well-being, but for believers,

it is, in the first place, a "therapy" to heal all that prevents them from conformity to the will of God. (2009)

6. May the authentic and perennial significance of this long held practice be rediscovered, and thus assist us to mortify our egoism and open our heart to love of God and neighbor, the first and greatest Commandment of the new Law and compendium of the entire Gospel (cf. *Mt* 22, 34-40). (2009)

7. The faithful practice of fasting contributes, moreover, to conferring unity to the whole person, body and soul, helping to avoid sin and grow in intimacy with the Lord. (2009)

8. Denying material food, which nourishes our body, nurtures an interior disposition to listen to Christ and be fed by His saving word. Through fasting and praying, we allow Him to come and satisfy the deepest hunger that we experience

in the depths of our being: the hunger and thirst for God. (2009)

9. Fasting is an aid to open our eyes to the situation in which so many of our brothers and sisters live...

Voluntary fasting enables us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who bends low and goes to the help of his suffering brother. (2009) 10.

Freely chosen detachment from the pleasure of food and other material goods helps the disciple of Christ to control the appetites of nature, weakened by original sin, whose negative effects impact the entire human person. (2009)

11. Saint Peter Chrysologus writes:

"Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others, you

open God's ear to yourself" (*Sermo* 43: PL 52, 320. 322). (2009)

12. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Causa nostrae laetitiae* , accompany and support us in the effort to free our heart from slavery to sin, making it ever more a "living tabernacle of God." (2009)

13. Lent offers us a providential opportunity to deepen the meaning and value of our Christian lives, and it spurs us to rediscover the mercy of God so that we, in turn, become more merciful toward our brothers and sisters. (2008)

14. "You cannot serve God and mammon" (*Lk* 16,13). Almsgiving helps us to overcome this constant temptation, teaching us to respond to our neighbour's needs and to share with others whatever we possess through divine goodness. (2008)

15. The force of attraction to material riches and just how categorical our decision must be not to make of them an idol, Jesus confirms in a resolute way: "You cannot serve God and mammon" (*Lk* 16,13). (2008)

16. We are not owners but rather administrators of the goods we possess: these, then, are not to be considered as our exclusive possession, but means through which the Lord calls each one of us to act as a steward of His providence for our neighbor. (2008)

17. In those countries whose population is majority Christian, the call to share is even more urgent, since their responsibility toward the many who suffer poverty and abandonment is even greater. To come to their aid is a duty of justice even prior to being an act of charity. (2008)

18. If, in accomplishing a good deed, we do not have as our goal God's glory and the real well being of our brothers and sisters, looking rather for a return of personal interest or simply of applause, we place ourselves outside of the Gospel vision. (2008)

19. Almsgiving, according to the Gospel, is not mere philanthropy: rather it is a concrete expression of charity, a theological virtue that demands interior conversion to love of God and neighbor, in imitation of Jesus Christ, who, dying on the cross, gave His entire self for us. (2008)

20. There is little use in giving one's personal goods to others if it leads to a heart puffed up in vainglory: for this reason, the one who knows that God "sees in secret" and in secret will reward, does not seek human recognition for works of mercy. (2008)

21. When we do things out of love, we express the truth of our being; indeed, we have been created not for ourselves but for God and our brothers and sisters (cf. 2 *Cor* 5,15). (2008)

22. Every time when, for love of God, we share our goods with our neighbour in need, we discover that the fullness of life comes from love and all is returned to us as a blessing in the form of peace, inner satisfaction and joy. Our Father in heaven rewards our almsgiving with His joy. (2008)

23. By drawing close to others through almsgiving, we draw close to God; it can become an instrument for authentic conversion and reconciliation with Him and our fellow men. (2008)

24. Following Christ's example, we can learn to make of our lives a total gift...not so much in giving a part of

what we possess, but our very selves.
(2008)

25. May Mary, Mother and faithful Servant of the Lord, help believers to enter the "spiritual battle" of Lent, armed with prayer, fasting and the practice of almsgiving, so as to arrive at the celebration of the Easter Feasts, renewed in spirit. (2008)

26. Lent is a favourable time to learn to stay with Mary and John, the beloved disciple, close to him who on the Cross, consummated for all mankind the sacrifice of his life (cf. *Jn* 19: 25). (2007)

27. It is in the mystery of the Cross that the overwhelming power of the Heavenly Father's mercy is revealed in all of its fullness. (2007)

28. Let us look at Christ pierced on the Cross! He is the unsurpassing revelation of God's love...On the Cross, it is God himself who begs the

love of His creature: He is thirsty for the love of every one of us. (2007)

29. The Almighty awaits the "yes" of His creatures just as a young husband awaits that of his wife. (2007)

30. Only the love that unites the free gift of oneself with the impassioned desire for reciprocity instills a joy that eases the heaviest of burdens. (2007)

31. The response the Lord ardently desires of us is above all that we welcome his love and allow ourselves to be drawn to him. (2007)

32. Let us live Lent, then, as a Eucharistic time in which, welcoming the love of Jesus, we learn to spread it around us with every word and deed. (2007)

33. May Lent be for every Christian a renewed experience of God's love

given to us in Christ, a love that each day we, in turn, must "re-give" to our neighbour, especially to the one who suffers most and is in need. (2007)

34. On the Cross, it is God himself who begs the love of His creature: He is thirsty for the love of every one of us. The Apostle Thomas recognized Jesus as "Lord and God" when he put his hand into the wound of His side. Not surprisingly, many of the saints found in the Heart of Jesus the deepest expression of this mystery of love. (2007)

35. The Church knows that if we are to promote development in its fulness, our own "gaze" upon mankind has to be measured against that of Christ. In fact, it is quite impossible to separate the response to people's material and social needs from the fulfilment of the profound desires of their hearts. (2006)

36. We must help others to find God in the merciful face of Christ.

Without this perspective, civilization lacks a solid foundation. (2006)

37. Those who act according to the logic of the Gospel live the faith as friendship with God Incarnate and, like Him, bear the burden of the material and spiritual needs of their neighbours. They see it as an inexhaustible mystery, worthy of infinite care and attention. They know that he who does not give God gives too little; as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta frequently observed, the worst poverty is not to know Christ. (2006)

38. Even in the "valley of darkness" of which the Psalmist speaks (*Ps* 23:4), while the tempter prompts us to despair or to place a vain hope in the work of our own hands, God is there to guard us and sustain us. (2006)

39. Lent is a privileged time of interior pilgrimage towards Him Who is the fount of mercy. It is a pilgrimage in which He Himself accompanies us through the desert of our poverty, sustaining us on our way towards the intense joy of Easter. (2006)

40. Throughout history, even when hate seems to prevail, the luminous testimony of His love is never lacking. To Mary, "the living fount of hope" (Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso* , XXXIII, 12), we entrust our Lenten journey, so that she may lead us to her Son. (2006)