**FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT [22nd February, 2015]**

READINGS: Genesis 9:8-15/ 1 Peter 3:18-22 / Mark 1:12-15

THEME: LENT – A SEASON OF RENEWAL

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

Beloved in Christ, the season of Lent could be likened to the season of spring in which trees, grasses and flowers, literally dead in the winter season, are given a new lease of life.  Lent is, therefore, a season in which the church reminds us of the need to constantly allow the grace of God to renew our relationship with Him.

Christian renewal often begins with ***repentance***, and so in his first preaching after his 40 days and nights of fasting and prayer, our Lord Jesus Christ proclaims: “***repent*** and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). Christian renewal is not static but dynamic; and to sustain it we need to use the various channels of God’s grace of renewal.  In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus models for us two of the channels of grace: ***prayer*** and ***fasting***. Two other channels of grace often mentioned in Lent are ***almsgiving*** and the ***confession*** of sins.

The use of a car may be a good imagery for organizing our thoughts on these four channels of God’s grace of renewal.  In the first place, ***prayer*** is like the fuel of the car.  As without some fuel a car cannot be driven, so without prayer, our spiritual life (with the Lord) stagnates.  In other words, as there should always be fuel in the tank of the car in order to drive it, so our prayer should not be occasional but constant.  Thus, St. Paul says: “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

Secondly, ***fasting*** could be likened to the servicing/maintenance of the car.  Imagine a car which has never been serviced/maintained.  Soon it will develop some faults and cease to move even if its tank is full of fuel.  Similarly, prayers alone are not sufficient for our spiritual life.  We need to fast occasionally, and Lent is an ideal time to fast, so as to empty our spiritual fuel tank of the dirty oil and the grease of sin; to tighten the lose spiritual bolts and nuts; and to fix our spiritual electrical and mechanical faults.

Thirdly, ***almsgiving*** is like the car insurance.  As insurance is a kind of savings account against the eventuality of accidents, so almsgiving or charity to the poor is a kind of security against our spiritual accidents of sins.  Thus, St. Peter says: “charity will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Pt. 4:8).

Fourthly, a car may be insured, well serviced and its fuel tank filled to capacity, but if we have no road-worthy certificate, we cannot legally drive it outside our compound.  To be spiritually “road worthy” and move “freely” with the Lord, we need to ***confess*** our sins.

Finally, let us pray intensively from our hearts, fast (at least) some days, be more charitable to the needy and confess our sins more regularly this season of Lent. As we do so, may God grant us a deep and lasting spiritual experience of his love and mercy. Amen!

(*You may read further on this topic by searching for “Lent – Confession”, “Lent – Prayer”, “Lent – Almsgiving” and “Lent – Fasting” on this website*.)