



Marist Province of West Africa

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LENTEN SOLIDARITY REFLECTIONS :

Ash Wednesday to Saturday of the 1st Week of Lent.

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me” (Matthew 25:40-45)”

If you wish to support the Marist Solidarity Mission of the Province of West Africa, please contact:

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DAY 1: ASH WEDNESDAY

“Theme: Lent, A time of being in Solidarity with others.”



Liturgy: 1st Reading: Joel 2:12-18. 2nd Reading: 2Cor 5:20b-6:2. Gospel Mathew 6:1-6, 16-18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I send you peace, love, and joy as we officially begin this year's Lenten Season 2023. This Lenten season 2023, we will be reflecting on the theme: **“Solidarity with the less privileged”**.

Solidarity is the word the Church uses to describe what it means to follow Jesus into relationship with those who are suffering or downtrodden. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis explains, “Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community (116)”. He continues, explaining what the principle of solidarity means for social systems: “Solidarity means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money... Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history...”

Living out solidarity can be hard at the individual level, and perhaps even harder to realize as a society. It is made possible through God's grace and the encounters we have with those on the margins which teach us to recognize them as our brothers and sisters and

undertake the hard work of learning to treat their burdens and joys as our own.

Once we have experienced these encounters, we learn that we cannot be wholly happy or satisfied while our brothers and sisters suffer. That is why we work for the Kingdom – so that all our joy might be complete. In the Gospel Jesus reminds us, “And when I am lifted up, I will draw everyone to myself.” In the coming days, we will be sharing the experiences of children and youths on their experience of solidarity. It is my hope that we will all join hands and support the Solidarity Mission of the Marist Province of West Africa of being attentive to the cries of the poor.

Questions for Reflection:

1. **Where have you seen the power of solidarity or encounter?**
2. **How do you feel the call of Jesus to draw near to someone in your midst who may be suffering or rejected?**

Let us Pray: Almighty and ever-living God, empower your one human family to join hands on our journey of faith. Send us your spirit of hope, so that we may work to alleviate human suffering and foster charity and justice in our world. Amen.



DAY 2

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Liturgy: First Reading: Deuteronomy 30: 15-20.

Gospel: Luke 9: 22-25

Theme: Solidarity with the sick



My name is Azah Albertine Ambit and I am 13 years old. I am in Form Two at Saint Albert's Comprehensive College, Bafut. One day at night during school social activities, one of my friends was very sick and she was crying. Many students became sad, including me and we shared in her sorrows. That was my first time of experiencing such a reaction in school.

When we got to the dormitory, the girl's illness became worse. So a group of students ran to the staff quarters to call for the school nurse. When she came, she tried all she could do to make the girl feel better but to no avail. So she called one of the Marist Brothers to take the girl to the hospital. All the girls were up when the Brother arrived because they cared about their friend. They dressed her up and the Brother took her to the hospital where the school nurse spent the night with her. When the nurse came back to school in the morning, the girl remained in the hospital.

It so happened that the girl's family was not able to take care of all the hospital bills. So,

with the encouragement of the school authorities, we made some financial contributions from our pocket allowances. The school added something to it and the amount was given to the family to assist them to pay her medical bills. We also prayed for her speedy and effective recovery and she was later on able to return to school when her condition improved.

Indeed, there is a great sense of Solidarity in our school. It is our prayer that this may spread in our society so that we may always show love and concern for one another.

Azah Albertine A (SAAC BAFUT—Cameroon)

DAY 3:

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Liturgy: First Reading: Isaiah 58: 1-9a.

Gospel: Matthew 9: 14-15

My name is Ngombeyina Stalpie and I am 14 years old. I am in the 5th grade at the Lycée Saint Marcellin Champagnat in Berberati. I come from Wambio, a village located 98 kilometers from Berberati. I live with my maternal aunt. I am happy to study in this Marist school because I feel loved by my fellow students, the staff as well as the Marist Brothers.

One day, I was sick, and I went to the hospital for medical attention. The results revealed that I had typhoid fever. The doctor gave me a prescription which I took to my aunt at home. But she told me that my father had not sent her any money for my care and that she could not do much since she did not have the means to buy my medication. In class, my classmates noticed that I was not in good shape, and they

reported the situation to the headmaster who received me in his office. I explained my situation to him, and he immediately paid for all my medication. Thanks to this, I was able to regain my health to better continue my classes.

At the Lycée Champagnat, as soon as a student is affected, everyone contributes, and the school adds its share to assist the person. There is therefore a solidarity between us the students thanks to the good care and concern of the schools' administration.

Ngombeyina Stalpie (Saint Marcellin Champagnat in Berberati-Central African Republic)

**DAY 4:
SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY**



Liturgy – First Reading: Isaiah 9b: 14.

Gospel: Luke 5: 27-32

Theme: Generosity, the key aspect of formation at the Marist Brothers Juniorate

Generosity is one of the main principles of the Lenten season. To that effect, in every term of

each academic year, the Marist Brothers' Juniorate family organizes an event called "Mass for the poor" where students donate items and pledge money for the less privileged. In this event, students are taught the morality of generosity. All the donated items and money pledged when gathered are given to the less privileged, while some students who are unable to pay or complete their school fees also benefit from this gesture.

This term's 'mass of generosity' was organized, and the solidarity started from our school because as it is commonly said "charity begins at home". A group of students who had financial difficulties in school were invited to the principal's office and a widows was given to them in order to better their lives.

Afterwards, some of the school authorities and students went into one of the villages on a solidarity mission. The journey was a successful one and they were able to identify a good number of persons in need. They helped them by sharing the things that the students had donated. This gesture put a lot of smiles on their faces and he students received countless blessings from them.

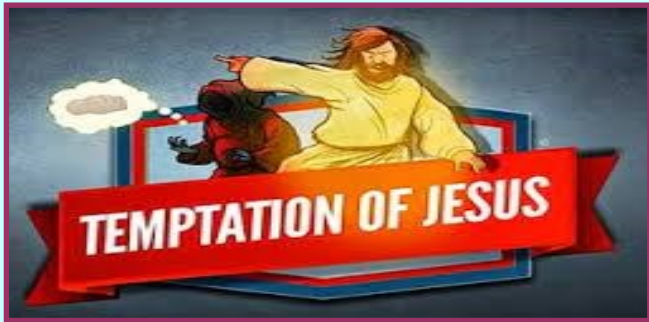
With all these, we are all encouraged to continue giving because there are a lot of people that need assistance and it can impact them no matter how small we give to them for indeed; "**GIVERS NEVER LACK**".

Students of Marist Brothers Juniorate - Nigeria

DAY 5: FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Liturgy: 1st Reading: Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7. 2nd Reading: Rom 5:12-19. Gospel Mathew 4:1-11.

Theme: Resist Temptations



The Gospel of the Liturgy today, first Sunday of Lent, takes us into the desert, where Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit, for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. Jesus too was tempted by the devil, and He accompanies us, every one of us, in our temptations. The desert symbolizes the fight against the seductions of evil, to learn to choose true freedom.

Twice the devil addresses him, saying: "If you are the Son of God..." (He is thus proposing to him to exploit his position: first to satisfy the material needs he feels, hunger, then to increase his power, and, finally, to have a prodigious sign from God. Three temptations. It is as if he were saying, "If you are Son of God, take advantage of it!". How often this happens to us: "But if you are in that position, take advantage of it! Don't lose the opportunity, the chance", that is, "think of your benefit". It is a seductive proposal, but it leads you to the enslavement of the heart: it makes us obsessed with the desire to have, it reduces everything to the possession of things, power, fame.

But Jesus opposes the attractions of evil in a winning way. How does he do this? By responding to temptations with the Word of God, which says not to take advantage, not to use God, others and things for oneself, not to take advantage of one's own position to obtain privileges. Because true happiness and true freedom are not found in possessing, but in

sharing; not in taking advantage of others, but in loving them; not in the obsession of power, but in the joy of service.

These temptations also accompany us on the journey of life. We must be vigilant – do not be afraid, it happens to everyone – and be vigilant, because they often present themselves under an apparent form of good. In fact, the devil, who is cunning, always uses deception. He wanted Jesus to believe that his proposals were useful to prove that he was really the Son of God. And he does so with us too: he often arrives "with sweet eyes", "with an angelic face"; he even knows how to disguise himself with sacred, apparently religious motives!

"I have done strange things, but I have helped the poor"; "I have taken advantage of my role – as a citizen, a governor, a priest, a bishop – but also for good"; "I have given in to my instincts, but in the end, I did no harm to anyone", these justifications, and so on, one after the other. Please: no compromises with evil! No dialogue with the devil! We must not enter into dialogue with temptation, we must not fall into that slumber of the conscience that makes us say: "But after all, it's not serious, everyone does it"! Let us look at Jesus, who does not seek accommodation, does not make agreements with evil. May this time of Lent also be a *time of the desert* for us. Let us take time for silence and prayer – just a little, it will do us good – in these spaces let us stop and look at what is stirring in our hearts, our inner truth, that which we know cannot be justified. Let us find inner clarity, placing ourselves before the Word of God in prayer, so that a positive fight against the evil that enslaves us, a fight for freedom, may take place within us.

Let us ask the Blessed Virgin to accompany us in the Lenten desert and to help us on our way of conversion.

[Pope's Francis reflection on 1st Sunday of Lent](#)

DAY 6
MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Liturgy - First Reading: Leviticus 19: 1-2, 11-18.

Gospel: Matthew 25: 31-46

Theme: The Samaritan Walk

In the Catholic tradition, Lent is a moment in which three core virtues of prayer, fasting and almsgiving in Christian tradition are intensified. In as much as we may have needy children in our schools, looking beyond demands we widen the tent of our love, care, and compassion.

In the 2004/2005 Lenten campaign, students of St Joseph's Mbengwi raised funds from their pocket money for Lenten solidarity. When this idea was shared with parents during the PTA, they were delighted and made some donations.

School prefects joined staff to donate food-stuff and clothing to mentally challenged persons in Bamenda town and Mbengwi prisons. Surrounded by a ramshackled fence, the prisoners were kept indoors 24/7 in a poorly lit hall. Students introduced themselves and tribes of origin, and prisoners clapped, gave shouts of joy, and greeted students in their respective mother tongues. This visit was an occasional episode of joy in the general drama of pain and isolation.

In Marist educational setups, we carry students on our shoulders while helping them to gaze at peripheries of a world different from the loving and calm school atmosphere. By so doing "we present the Good News not only in personal terms but also in the form of Jesus' vision of the human community: reaching out to the "least"

of our society, seeking the common good of all, and taking responsibility for the future of humanity and of God's creation." (Vision for Marist Education today, pg 20)

In the Samaritan walk, staff, students, parents and well-wishers came across a broken humanity, offering support, hope, and journeying with them, and leading them to the inn (Church) where the physical and spiritual treasures are used to heal them. The students had the experience of the Lenten tomb of pain and sorrow for the prisoners, and hopefully, these prisoners will one day walk through the heavily guarded doors where soldiers will be witnesses of transformed men and women whose lives will point to the resurrection.

Br Simon Kanjam

DAY 7
TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Liturgy - First Reading: Isaiah 55: 10-11.

Gospel: Matthew 6: 7-15



My names are Mounmadje Brya and I am in my final year at Lycée-Collège Marie Ke Tal in Koumra, which is in the South of of Chad. I am 17 years old and I live with my parents. I am a beneficiary of the SED project which has enabled me to go through school since I was in primary 1. This has been possible thanks to the generosity of the so many donors all over the world and in particular the Marist Brothers.

The SED project has been very helpful to me as it has taken care of almost all my needs and I can study without any issues. I feel loved and blessed by this Solidarity project as well as the Marist Brothers. This has taught me the love of neighbor, God, and myself.

I am very grateful to the Marist Brothers because it is thanks to them that I have been able to develop the intelligence that God has given me today. I would therefore like this project to continue helping vulnerable children and orphans. I also thank those who oversee this project for having guided my steps until today, may God give them the strength and courage to continue in this direction until the end.

Mounmadje Brya (Lycée-Collège Marie Ke Tal in Koumra - Tchad)

My mother met the Marist Brothers during a youth activity in the parish and it is through their generosity that I was registered in their school while I was in class 3. My mother does not have a stable job and could therefore not afford to pay for my school fees, but I have always had all my school needs provided by the Marist Brothers.

I have come from a long way, and I know I still have a milestone to achieve but I have decided to work hard so as to repay the kindness and benevolence of the Marist Brothers and all their benefactors who see to it that children from less privileged homes have access to education.

I hope to become an agent of transformation, change and solidarity with the needy in the future and for that I promise to work hard. I also want to appeal to all persons of goodwill to support in their own way the Marist Brothers in their mission of evangelization through education. May God help us all to live a fruitful Lenten season 2023 in the spirit of generosity towards others.

Saraka Aya Erica Fernande (College Privé Saint Marcellin Champagnat in Bouaké-Ivory Coast)

DAY 8

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT



Liturgy - First Reading: Jonah 3: 1-10.

Gospel: Luke 11: 29-32

My name is Saraka Aya Erica Fernande and I am a Form one student of College Privé Saint Marcellin Champagnat in Bouaké. I am 11 years old and I come from Sakassou, a village not far from Bouaké. I live with my grandmother in Bouaké.



DAY 9

THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Liturgy - First Reading: Jonah 3: 1-10.

Gospel: Luke 11: 29-32

Theme: Gratitude to God and Mankind



My name is Konan Grace and I am a class six pupil of Centre Scolaire Saint Marcellin Champagnat in Bouaké. I come from the Konankankro, a village which is a few kilometers from Bouaké. My mother is a cook, and my father is a mason, and they don't earn much money. Given the work that my parents do, I never thought that I would be able to attend such a prestigious school. I am happy to study in my school because I feel loved by my classmates, teachers as well as the Marist Brothers. The Marist Brothers, in their kindness have helped my elder sister from primary one until she got her BEPC. Similarly, my younger brother who is in primary 2 has been in Champagnat since he was in the nursery section thanks to the benevolence of the Marist Brothers.

I can't thank God enough for the education that the Marist Brothers have enabled me and my siblings to have. They have helped my parents to educate us, and we will be forever grateful to them. I pray that God may send many more persons of goodwill to support the good work of the Marist Brothers. I hope to continue my studies and become a lawyer in the future as I want to break the cycle of poverty that exists in many families today. May God give me this grace as my name says it all.

Konan Grace (Pupil at Centre Scolaire Saint Marcellin Champagnat, Bouaké-Ivory Coast)

DAY 10

FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Liturgy - First Reading: Ezekiel 18: 21-28.

Gospel: Matthew 5: 20-26

My name is Coulibaly Tortcha Clothild. I am a form three student at Catholic College Marcellin Champagnat Korhogo. I consider myself blessed to have joined this college. I am always almost the last to report to school because my parents struggle to pay my school fees and even my school needs are a challenge. The Marist Brothers who are our teachers and mentors are very attentive to the needs of their students and it was not long before they noticed that my uniform was outworn because I have only one school attire.

I have been helped by the school community and in particular the Marist Brothers and I am very grateful. I can now continue my education without much worries thanks to their kind gestures. I don't know what I will be in the future but I thank God for the kindness I have found at Catholic College Marcellin Champagnat Korhogo. I will work very hard to help my family and other poor children when I grow up. May God help us all.

Coulibaly Tortcha Clothild. (College Catholique Marcellin Champagnat-Korhogo)



DAY 11

SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Liturgy - First Reading: Ezekiel 18: 21-28.

Gospel: Matthew 5: 20-26

Theme: Love unites all religions



This is my third year in St Pius school in Tatum which is a Catholic School run by the Marist Brothers. However, I have faced many challenges because I am a muslim. One good thing is that I have learned more about the Catholic faith and beliefs. I have also learned a lot about the Bible since I was more familiar with the Quran. To tell the truth, it has all been a good experience,

Through the Marist Brothers I have been helped financially with my school needs and it is my wish that I may be assisted again in the coming years. It has been a wonderful experience for me, and I promise to repay this favour by studying hard, helping my parents with house chores, helping my friends who aren't as intelligent as I am with their studies and above all being respectful to my teachers and elders since this is the least I can do at this level. In future, I may be blessed with the means to assist other persons in the society. As of now, I can only pray that God may bless and protect all those who are helping me and other students with fees and didactic materials.

In my school there are students of different religious beliefs and family backgrounds and

characters very different from mine and sometimes strange. As such it is sometimes not very easy to relate with them but my parents taught me to always respect everyone, be friendly but avoid bad and destructive friendships. So, I have decided to make friends with those who study hard and know why they are in school.

Another great challenge of my school life is the current sociopolitical crisis in our two English speaking Regions of Cameroon which has affected education greatly. Many schools have been destroyed, students and teachers attacked and some killed. Though our own school has never gone through this type of trial, I still feel scared every day. I keep praying that God will give us peace and protection in these regions so that all students and teachers may operate in a free environment. I equally pray that God may have mercy on those who have lost their lives and receive their souls in His Kingdom.

As it is said, some disappointments can turn into blessings. We do not have enough teachers but I enjoy the fact that for three years we have been dealing with almost the same set of teachers with whom we are familiar and because of that, we understand them better. This has helped me to understand my lessons better. However, I fear that the few teachers available may be put under the stress of working within the crisis for long and dealing with increasing number of students as many more students keep coming to school.

To conclude, it is really a good experience to be a student and especially in a Catholic School. I pray and wish that my brothers and sisters who have refused coming to school and doing nothing at home may change and enjoy this advantage. I also pray that God may send many more persons of goodwill to support our education.

Shakiratu Nyuykonghe (St Pius the X Catholic Secondary School, Tatum- Cameroon)