My brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today we set out on the spiritual journey of Lent.

This is a season of prayers, penance and charity.

In a short while, through the imposition of ashes on our heads, we will remember that our life is brief. We are just ashes and dust — and to dust we will return. Through this imposition of ashes, we will remember that we are sinners — in need of repentance.

Our Lenten journey is a journey of conversion. And the beauty of this journey is that we do not travel alone. We go together, as children of God, as the Church. And we go with Jesus Christ, our Brother and our Savior.

Jesus spent 40 days in the desert wilderness. And today we join him.

So today we share in his sacrifices, his sufferings. As Jesus did — we deny ourselves; we fast, we pray, we give to others. We do this, my dear brothers and sisters, so that we can share in his holiness.

This the goal of our lives. This is why God made us. Not to be dust. Not to be sinners.

God wants us to be great! We are called to the holiness of God, to a share in his own holiness.

So during this Lent, let us journey with Jesus.

With Jesus, let us make time to pray again. To pray as Jesus teaches us today in the Gospel. To pray in secret. Just you and God talking, heart to heart. Speaking personally to God, but also listening for his voice, listening for his commands.

With Jesus, let us learn again during this Lent how to give to others.

Let’s try to pay more attention to the people in our lives. Let’s try to open our hearts. To give ourselves to those around us — without holding anything back. Without being so selfish. Without thinking always about our own interests.
During this Lent, let’s try to learn to fast again. To make those little acts of self-denial. Not worrying so much about our own comfort, about our own little things. But being able to give up whatever we think that we can. Even in practical things as what we eat or we drink. But most importantly in the way that we give ourselves to others, as I said before.

During this Lent, let us ask God to give us all a new heart, a new spirit, a new life! That comes from a real conversion of heart, that is what Lent is all about.

Then, finally during this Lent, as we also know, the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation this past Monday and that’s going to happen at the end of the month, on February 28. And the Cardinals of the Church are going to be selecting a new Pope with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In stepping down as Pope, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has given us a beautiful model of humility and sacrifice and service to God. He is a great, wonderful man who has shown us the path to holiness.

So during this Lent, let us accompany our Holy Father, accompany the whole Church, offering prayers and sacrifices for him during our Lenten journey. And let us pray for the holiness and renewal of our universal Church.

It is a beautiful time, Lent. It is one of the strong times of the liturgy of the Church and it is an extraordinary moment in the life of the Church. During this year of Faith as we try to renew and strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ. What a better way to spend this Lent but walking with Jesus in this beautiful journey – these 40 days as we prepare for Holy Week and Easter Sunday.

Let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church to accompany us on our Lenten journey and to show us how to be true followers of Jesus Christ.

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1 Readings: Joel 2:12–18; Ps. 51:3–6, 12–13, 17; 2 Cor. 5:20–6:2; Matt. 6:1–6, 16–18.