



February 22, 2023

Circular Letter #6
Subject: Lent

***“Repent and believe in the gospel.”
Prayer at the imposition of the ashes***

Dear Sisters and Associates,

As we begin our annual Lenten journey, we usually think about what practices we may engage in during this liturgical season. Often, we pick something we have done for years like not eating candy, not eating between meals, praying the Stations of the Cross every Friday, or visiting a neighbor who now lives in a nursing home. Perhaps we should consider a new approach this Lent.

I would like to suggest we focus on the word **“repent”**. There are several definitions of this word that may expand our understanding. A very basic one is to change your mind. What is the biblical definition of repent? In the story of Joseph and his brothers, the biblical concept of repentance is far more than simply saying “I am sorry.” Biblically, to repent means to rearrange your entire way of thinking, feeling, and being, and to forsake that which is wrong. Judah and his brothers showed remorse, but more importantly, they showed transformation.

The Hebrew word *teshuvah* offers a different focus. Instead of being simply a state of mind, it is a decision. It is deciding to turn away from where you are headed and to move back toward God. It may be adjusting your course or completely turning around – physically, emotionally and spiritually. In a distinctly Franciscan spirit, this is a continuous decision to return to God and to receive a new beginning.

So how shall we repent this Lent? If you have a strained relationship in your life, address it according to the biblical example of Joseph and his brothers. Maybe examine your attitudes toward individuals with whom you interact as well as groups of persons of whom you disapprove. Learn more about them, interact with them if possible and then enjoy a change of mind and heart toward them. Consider the corporal works of mercy and where a change of attitude, heart and mind is needed for you personally. Instead of a Lent of giving up consider this a Lent of making positive, long-lasting changes.

My prayer for you during this Lenten season is that you can embrace the true meaning of repentance and come to celebrate Easter with a transformed heart. That will be a heart that has turned fully to God and is living the newness of life that comes with repentance.

In the Risen Christ,

Sister Maureen O'Connor, O.S.F.

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Provincial Superior