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MISSION MESSAGE

Live Lent with the Heart of a Missionary!

By Shannon Kowalski
Diocesan Director,
Pontifical Mission Societies



If you're anything like me, Lent can sometimes feel like a checklist of "must-dos" — prayer, fasting and almsgiving — that we strive to complete in order to have a "good" Lent. I know these practices are not mere obligations but invitations to grow closer to Christ through self-sacrifice and charity. Yet, I often find myself at Holy Week looking back, wishing I had done more.

As I reflected on how to approach Lent this year, I came across a quote from St. Thérèse of Lisieux: *"Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love."* Her words remind me that holiness is found even in the seemingly ordinary moments of life and that no act of love, great

or small, is insignificant. They invite me to truly live this Lent with a missionary heart.

For me, prayer is the foundation of Lent — a time to deepen my relationship with God. Through prayer, I seek guidance, strength, and renewal. St. Thérèse, though confined to a cloister, exemplified the missionary power of prayer. She longed to go to Vietnam as a missionary, but her fragile health prevented her from making the journey. Rather than allowing disappointment to diminish her zeal, she devoted her prayers and suffering to support missionaries around the world. Her life reveals that prayer is not passive; it is an active participation in God's mission. This Lent, I am reminded that prayer is not just a personal devotion but a means of lifting up others — interceding for the sick, the poor, those in war-torn regions, and missionaries bringing the Gospel to distant places.

Fasting is often associated with food restrictions, but its spiritual significance runs deeper. It is a discipline of detachment, a way of freeing myself from worldly distractions to focus on what truly matters. St. Thérèse's words challenge me to see fasting not just in dramatic sacrifices but in small, everyday acts

relinquishing comforts, enduring inconveniences with patience, and responding to difficulties with kindness rather than frustration. Her *Little Way* teaches that every sacrifice, no matter how small, can be transformed into an offering of love. Choosing a smile instead of a complaint, silence instead of gossip, or patience in the face of irritation — these become fasts of the heart, aligning my spirit with Christ's own sacrifice. When seen through this lens, fasting is no longer a burden but a path to grace.

Almsgiving is the natural fruit of prayer and fasting. It is the call to serve others, not just through material giving but through acts of mercy and love. St. Thérèse embodied this in her convent, showing patience and care even to those who challenged her. She understood that the greatest gift we can give is love and that even the smallest gestures — financial, emotional or spiritual — carry eternal value when done with love. Lent calls us to step beyond our comfort zone in generosity. This might mean donating to those in need, offering companionship to the lonely, or simply speaking a word of encouragement. True almsgiving is not measured by the size of the gift but by the love with which it is given.

Though St. Thérèse never set foot in the missions, she is honored as the patroness of missionaries. Her life reminds us that missionary work is not limited to far-off lands — it is found in every heart that seeks to love as Christ loved. This is the heart of Lenten prayer, fasting and almsgiving: offering my life, in small yet meaningful ways, for the good of others.

Apostleship of Prayer

Papal Intention for March 2025

For Families in Crisis —

Let us pray that broken families might discover the cure for their wounds through forgiveness, rediscovering each other's gifts, even in their differences.