



POPE LEO'S MESSAGE FOR LENT 2026

LISTENING, FASTING, AND CONVERSION OF HEART



BY ALMIE LONZAGA | MARCH 2, 2026

As the Church has begun Lent 2026, Pope Leo XIV calls the faithful to return God to the center of daily life through a renewed commitment to listening, fasting, and conversion of heart. In his message, “Listening and Fasting: Lent as a Time of Conversion,” the Holy Father writes: “Lent is a time in which the Church...invites us to place the mystery of God back in the center of our lives, in order to find renewal in our faith and keep our hearts from being consumed by the anxieties and distractions of daily life.” He reminds us that “every path towards conversion begins by allowing the word of God to touch our hearts and welcoming it with a docile spirit.”

Listening is an Act of Love

The Pope first reflects on listening, which he calls “the first way we demonstrate our desire to enter into relationship.” He points to God’s revelation to Moses—“I have heard their cry” (Ex 3:7)—as the model of divine attentiveness. Even now, he says, God shares His heart with His people, and “listening to the word in the liturgy teaches us to listen to the truth of reality.” Amid life’s many voices, Sacred Scripture helps Christians discern the cries of those who suffer. The Pope emphasizes that “the condition of the poor is a cry that... constantly challenges our lives, societies, political and economic systems, and, not least, the Church.”

Fasting with Humility

Turning to fasting, Pope Leo XIV describes it as an ancient discipline that opens the heart to God. Because it involves the body, he explains, fasting “makes it easier to recognize what we ‘hunger’ for and what we deem necessary for our sustenance.” It reveals our desires, orders our appetites, and keeps our thirst alive for justice. Drawing on St. Augustine, he writes: “This reaching out in desire expands the soul and increases its capacity.” For this reason, fasting must be lived in “faith and humility” and grounded in communion with the Lord, for “those who are unable to nourish themselves with the word of God do not fast properly.” He notes that other forms of self-denial contribute to a more authentic Christian life, since “austerity alone makes the Christian life strong and authentic.”

“Disarm our language...” - Pope Leo XIV

Abstaining from Hurtful Words

At the heart of the Pope’s message is an invitation to practice a fast of the tongue. He writes: “I would like to invite you to a very practical and frequently unappreciated form of abstinence: that of refraining from words that offend and hurt our neighbor.” He urges believers to “disarm our language,” avoiding harsh speech, rash judgment, slander, and gossip. Instead, he encourages kindness and respect in families, friendships, workplaces, and online interactions, so that “words of hatred will give way to words of hope and peace.”

A Communal Path of Conversion

The Pope also emphasizes that Lent is a communal journey. Just as the people of God gathered in Scripture to hear the Law and renew their covenant, we too are called to walk together. Listening to God’s Word and to

“the cry of the poor and of the earth” deepens our relationships and strengthens our witness. True conversion, he says, also concerns “the quality of our relationships and dialogue,” challenging us to recognize what truly guides our desires and how our communities respond to humanity’s longing for justice and reconciliation.

Pope Leo XIV concludes his message with a prayerful appeal: “Let us ask for the grace of a Lent that leads us to greater attentiveness to God and to the least among us.” He especially urges us to embrace a fasting that extends to speech, “so that hurtful words may diminish and give way to a greater space for the voice of others.” He envisions communities where the suffering find welcome and where listening leads to paths of liberation, guiding us toward the building of a “civilization of love.”

Sources:

Pope Leo XIV, Message for Lent 2026 – “Listening and Fasting: Lent as a Time of Conversion.” The Vatican, February 5, 2026, Memorial of Saint Agatha.

Devin Watkins. “Pope’s Lenten message: Abstain from harsh words and rash judgment.” Vatican News, Feb 13, 2026.



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