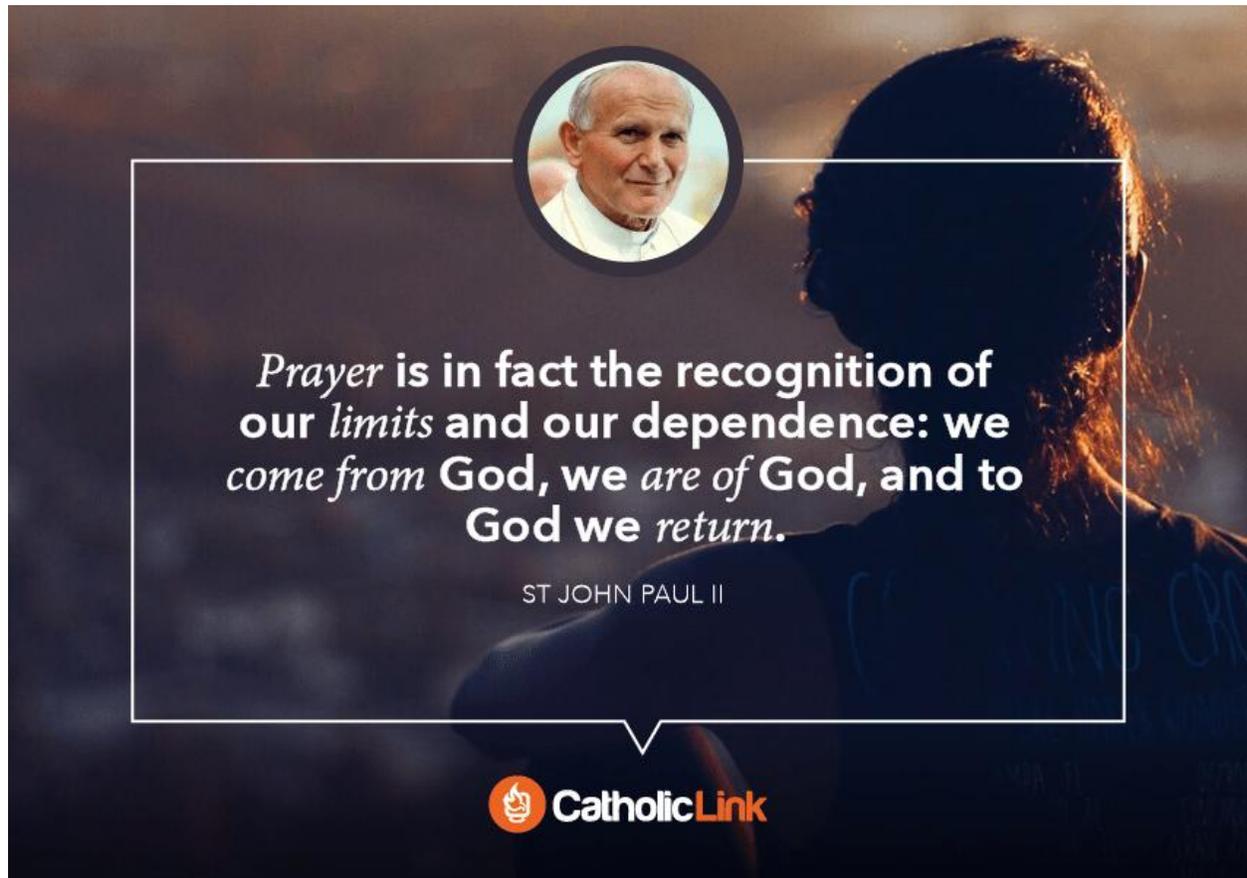


**FROM FATHER JOHN:** “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” (1 Peter 3:15)



The season of Lent is a season of hope. We sometimes forget this because we focus on fasting, almsgiving and prayer as spiritual exercises during Lent and these exercises require that we sacrifice our time, our treasure and our physical desires as we turn to the Lord. The Cross is the central icon of the Christian faith. St Thomas Aquinas was asked where he learned his wisdom. “At the foot of the Cross of Christ,” he replied. Our Lord Jesus calls us to take up our cross daily and follow after Him.

Henry Suso, an early Jesuit, wrote, “There is nothing more painful than suffering, and nothing more joyful than to have suffered. Suffering is short pain and long joy. Suffering has this effect on the one to whom suffering is suffering, that it ceases to be suffering.... Suffering makes a wise and practiced person. People who have not suffered, what do they know...? All the saints are the cup-bearers of a suffering person, for they have all tasted it once themselves, and they cry out with one voice that it is free from poison and a wholesome drink.”

God is the craftsman who created the entire universe and we can explain to non-believers that God exists, that God created us and that God gives us great hope, and, as St. Peter wrote, we have a reason for our hope.

Pope St. Leo the Great wrote about how we can realize this hope through the purification of our spirit; that the whole world rejoices in the forgiveness of our sins. We find great hope and great joy when we experience God's forgiveness of our sins.

*"Dear friends, at every moment the earth is full of the mercy of God, and nature itself is a lesson for all the faithful in the worship of God. The heavens, the sea and all that is in them bear witness to the goodness and omnipotence of their Creator, and the marvelous beauty of the elements as they obey him demands from the intelligent creation a fitting expression of its gratitude.*

*But with the return of that season marked out in a special way by the mystery of our redemption, and of the days that lead up to the paschal feast, we are summoned more urgently to prepare ourselves by a purification of spirit.*

*The special note of the paschal feast is this: the whole Church rejoices in the forgiveness of sins. It rejoices in the forgiveness not only of those who are then reborn in holy baptism but also of those who are already numbered among God's adopted children.*

*Initially, men are made new by the rebirth of baptism. Yet there still is required a daily renewal to repair the shortcomings of our mortal nature, and whatever degree of progress has been made there is no one who should not be more advanced. All must therefore strive to ensure that on the day of redemption no one may be found in the sins of his former life.*

*Dear friends, what the Christian should be doing at all times should be done now with greater care and devotion, so that the Lenten fast enjoined by the apostles may be fulfilled, not simply by abstinence from food but above all by the renunciation of sin." (Pope St. Leo the Great)*

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.