We begin the Lenten Season. According to the intention of the Church, it is a time of renewal, penance and conversion. For the first Christians, the proclamation of penance was “Good News.” God was going to forgive them their failings, God was going to reveal his love and compassion for them.

For us modern people today, it has to do with bad news. If in a Christian assembly they speak of Lent, penance, and sacrifice, many faces become sad. They become fearful about what they hold most dear: their pocketbook, cigarettes, television, good food..... What might be the reason for this change between the early and the modern Christians?

In the early Church, only those who had committed serious crimes did penance: public penitents. But on Holy Thursday, at the Mass of reconciliation, these sinners seemed so happy, renewed, and innocent, that the other faithful felt jealous of them. They lamented not having experienced such a charitable penance. The following year, they too would ask to be admitted to the Lenten penance.

And we, the Christians of today? We think too much of ourselves. We think about the renunciations, the cross, sacrifices, Lenten confession.....as things which will cost us something and which we fear.

But we do not think about God who summons us.....who is waiting for us and who will turn everything into joy if we surrender our heart to Him.

Many of us Christians have an imperfect idea and even a false idea about our religion. We believe that religion consists in what we do for God, in those unpleasant things which we impose on ourselves for God.

How many things I’ve done for God! I’ve sacrificed so much for Him! I’ve renounced so many things for love of Him!