**Lenten reflection 1**

There are three things by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting, and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy, and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other.

Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them: they cannot be separated. If you have only one of them or not all together, you have nothing. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others.

—St. Peter Chrysologus (c 380 to c 450), bishop of Ravenna

Time and time again, the evangelists speak about fasting. Jesus recommended fasting as a means of making progress in the spiritual life. What Jesus has said about fasting can be summed up in this way: fasting is as necessary as prayer (cf. Matthew 6:16).

There are only two days in the Church year when fasting is required: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. But the importance of fasting has not lessened. Fasting will lead us to a new freedom of heart and mind. It gives us a focus on the Lord who is still to come.