

Sermon for Ash Wednesday
Conversion and Repentance

By Father Daniel Mafla

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Dear community of San Pablo, may God bless you.

Today, as we begin Lent, let us pause in our journey and open our hearts sincerely. Let us remember the words of God when He interrupted Peter in his temptation to seek comfort:

“This is my beloved Son; listen to Him.”

May these words guide our reflection and help us step out of what makes us comfortable but does not transform us.

Let us pray together:

Lord, during this Lenten season, draw us closer to You. Help us live beyond empty routines and superficial practices. Make us faithful to Your love, so that we break everything that causes injustice, do not ignore suffering, and share our bread with those in need.

When we call to You, may You answer us and say, “Here I am.”
Amen.

Now, community, we continue connected to Sunday’s reflection about Peter’s temptation to seek comfort and security, trying to

build spaces without discomfort in our life or home. Yet, living in community requires openness, responsibility, and commitment.

These values are also present in religious practices and good works, like offering, prayer, and fasting, pillars of Judaism and the tradition Jesus belonged to. But when these practices become mere routine, they lose their meaning and become superficial.

That is why, in the Gospel, Jesus invites us to purify these practices through the Holy Spirit, taking His example as our guide. He reminds us that the Law is not to be discarded but lived through love for God and for our neighbor. Religious practices come from deep values: solidarity, humility, dependence on God, and responsibility toward others. Without love and inner conversion, they become lifeless external acts.

Jesus transforms the way we understand the Law: He does not remove it, but brings it to its fullness. He teaches that it is not enough to follow rules; we must live a real relationship with God and with others, moving from rule to love, from appearance to authenticity, and from cold obedience to active mercy.

Today, the Church and our community are called to give these practices their true meaning not as obligations, but as paths that transform the heart. We are called to live the Gospel through justice, reconciliation, care for others, and building healthy relationships. We are also called to accompany those in a world

thirsting for meaning, showing that faith is not a burden, but a path of freedom; that spiritual discipline forms the heart; and that life in community sustains and gives life.

To understand this better, let us think of the family, the oldest institution we know. It is the first place where we learn security, trust, and love, and where our first role models appear. Being family means life, prayer, teachings, and understanding; above all, it is a vocation built day by day, through daily life, achievements, and shared difficulties.

The strength of a family comes from the bonds between its members and the shared hope in the projects they build together. The love planted by parents grows and takes root in the heart of their children. Just as in the family, in the life of faith it is not enough to follow external rules; without love, relationship, and life, faith becomes empty.

We must ask ourselves: if we do not live our faith and do not set an example, how can we expect our traditions to make sense? If we demand but do not give, if we complain but do not participate, we fall into the comfortable zone, the same temptation Peter faced. This temptation affects everyone: children, parents, and all who live the faith or are part of society.

Jesus also makes it clear that acts of charity should not be done to gain prestige, power, or privileges. He criticizes those who

pretend to follow the Law just to be seen. This is a constant call to the Church whenever we risk remaining in appearances instead of living the truth of the Gospel.

Therefore, today more than ever, we are invited to return to the essentials: to live our religious practices with love, truth, and through the Spirit, allowing them to transform not only what we do but who we are.

Amen.