

My dear Little Flower,

Snakes and Ladders. It's a board game. When I was a kid, I remember playing this game. The board is made up of boxes - a hundred of them. You start from one and dice your way up to 100. Along the way, there would be ladders that would accelerate you to a higher number, but also there'd be snakes that would slide you down. The worst snake is that which is placed in the 99th cube! No one wants to land on 99 - because it goes down to like the 9th cube! So, you would realize that the game will take longer than you thought!

Lent is like playing *Snakes and Ladders*. It is an opportunity to start over, only to be with others and with God, and to look for a companion - a friend - in our spiritual journey, the true "ladders" of our life who would lift us up. Today, Ash Wednesday, we recognize our mortality, we recognize our limitations, our frailty and humanity. We recognize that we cannot journey in this life *alone*. We have to *do* Lent with each other as a Church. We have to invite Jesus into our spiritual life and pilgrimage. We cannot just go on with our life just being *spiritual*, because we cannot tell when we fall from 99 to 9, from 46 to 33; and we need a boost from the Lord in this journey of life to reach 100. The reality of human life is that there are as many *snakes* as there are *ladders* around. We need each other and we need Christ.

The Lenten Season and Pilgrimage is a beautiful time for our church and our families to be renewed, and to have that renewal *together*.

Today, when we place the cross on our forehead with these ashes, we remind ourselves that we all need a *spiritual hard-reset!* We must have a spiritual reset - and that is the invitation of the Lord: to go back to the basics of our faith during Lent. To pray to fast and to give alms to those who are in need. Go back to the basics, because it is in the simplicity of the basics where we meet the Lord. This is the invitation of the Lord to His church today: we may think we are already spiritually "up there" (maybe you are), but for now - pray, fast, and give to one another.

Your parish priest,
Fr JC Merino