



Lincoln-Inspired Movement to Pray and Fast for God's Mercy on the Country and the Healing and Conversion of Our Hearts

Fr. John Riccardo and the team of the Detroit-based non-profit apostolate ACTS XXIX are calling for a National Day of Prayer and Fasting on September 24.

"Looking at all that's happening in our country right now, it seems we're in need of a lot of things," says Fr. Riccardo. "Policy and law are crucial, to be sure. But as important as these are, they can't fix the root problem. The real problem of American culture today is that our hearts are messed up. Only God can fix the human heart, and He loves doing that."

Fr. Riccardo explains the idea for the entire nation devoting a single day to prayer and fasting grew out of the weekly podcast series produced by ACTS XXIX, *You Were Born for This with Fr. John Riccardo*. "We did an episode in mid-July about the need for courage in these times and the response was terrific." He and the team began working on a follow-up installment when several seemingly unrelated incidents converged to set the ACTS XXIX team on their present course.

That weekend at church, one of Sunday's Readings was 1 Kings 3:5-12, which recounts the story of King Solomon asking God for wisdom as a leader. While meditating on the passage, Fr. Riccardo says he was taken in prayer to President Lincoln, whom he esteems as a Solomon-like leader, who embodied extraordinary courage and wisdom, which then led him to Lincoln's three Presidential Proclamations from the 1860s calling for a National Day of Prayer and Fasting. "I was intrigued by the idea of the whole country participating together on one day. How momentous would that be to feel everybody's knees hitting the ground at the same time."

That same afternoon—and completely unawares—ACTS XXIX Associate Director Mary Guilfoyle reached out to Fr. Riccardo and other members of the team, sharing that she had felt called in her own reflections on the day's Scriptures to pray and fast for the nation and urged that ACTS XXIX as an organization take the lead.

"Clearly, the Holy Spirit was guiding us," says Fr. Riccardo.

Lincoln chose the last Thursday of September in his first proclamation, so Fr. Riccardo and the ACTS XXIX team decided to follow suit. This year the last Thursday of September falls on the 24th and that date, as it turns out, possesses additional significance. "There's no feast day associated with September 24 in the Catholic liturgical calendar," notes Fr. Riccardo, "but it used to be dedicated to Our Lady of Ransom."

Fr. Riccardo explains that not only is this a day devoted to the Patroness of our country, but it's also a day specifically focused on her role in our rescue and redemption. "Mary is the mother of the Redeemer," he continues. "What does it mean to ransom someone? It means to rescue a person, even at the cost of one's life. That's the message of the Gospel. So



suddenly this initiative for a day of prayer and fasting for the nation is united to the story of our salvation.”

“This is not about politics or any particular social movement or even the November election,” Fr. Riccardo cautions. “This is about asking for God’s mercy on our nation and for the healing of our hearts—all of our hearts, starting with mine.” His hope is that the entire country, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and all people of good will, would set September 24 aside as a true holy day, forego food until dinner, and pray for the conversion of hearts.

“Let’s avoid spending money unless we absolutely have to, gather in our houses of worship, and take part in our most sacred religious practices,” Fr. Riccardo suggests. “For Catholics, that means getting in front of the Blessed Sacrament, participating in a Eucharistic procession, or celebrating Mass at the Hour of Mercy.” Fr. Riccardo and the ACTS XXIX team encourages everyone to put September 24 on their calendar, spread the word on social media, and “ask God for what only God can do.”

In the end, Fr. Riccardo turns to Scripture as authority for an appeal to the country to fast and pray: “When God says in 2 Chronicles 7:14 that if His people humble themselves and pray, He will heal their land, He’s making a promise.”

For more information about Fr. John Riccardo, ACTS XXIX, and their call for September 24 as a National Day of Prayer and Fasting, visit ActsXXIX.org.