We have entered Lent: a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is a time of spiritual renewal as well. For us, Africans, this year, we do so as we experience the particular reality of the northern half of our continent, Arab Africa, as we often call it. Unprecedented events are taking place there and we all worry whether they will lead to lasting democratic changes or to a simple "cosmetic makeover" which will soon reveal the wrinkles that come with age. Food for thought!

On the west of the African continent, things are getting seriously bogged down in the Ivory Coast. A huge concern. On the Horn of the continent, piracy has become a way of life in a country that hasn't had a functional government in more than two decades. Yes, piracy in the age of Facebook and iPad.

In the land of Patrice Lumumba, the politico-economic situation leaves a lot to be desired. Government institutions seem to have lead in their wings. In the meantime, slogans carry the day: « Five Work sites, » « Zero Tolerance." But nothing happens. The country goes from bad to worse. And there seems to be no end on the horizon to the misery of the Congolese people. Unfortunately!

And the list could go on ……. indefinitely.

What is happening on the African continent, and elsewhere in the world, has not happened by chance: there are some who thirst to have their "Voice" heard, one that is often ignored. Others latch on to power in order to be able to continue their abuse to the detriment of their people. Greed!

At the beginning of this Lenten season, I have been thinking of all these situations, without overlooking, to be sure, our slavery (all of us) to sin, the root of all the world's ills. What does it mean for us to enter Lent today, you and me? It is, as Jesus would say, "Get up and walk!" We are the paralytics and need to hear this command, this directive from the One who told us, "Do not fear!" Therefore, there is no reason for us to remain passive. Absolutely none.

Lent is a call to action. Action on the part of those who struggle to end political dictatorships. Action on the part of those who clamber that there may appear once again the image and

likeness of God on so many abused faces, covered with the wounds and scars of scorn inflicted by the violent. Action on the part of the women of the Congo, humiliated beyond measure, reduced to a state of slavery on their own soil and by their fellow countrymen. Shame and outrage. How can we, during this Lent, restore a spark of hope to all these « living dead ,» to these specters who have bone and flesh?

Assumptionists, we are ever ready to go “wherever God is threatened in man and man is threatened as the image of God” (RL #4). One of the best known passages of our Rule of Life, I would say. Often I have wondered what that phrase might mean for me and my brothers of the Province of Africa. To be an Assumptionist in Africa, it seems to me, more today than ever, is a challenge. In a context where so many men and women have been threatened and their dignity crushed underfoot, I reproach myself for having remained silent for so long. As some might say, a silence of complicity. As if there weren’t anything out of the ordinary going on. But this morning, however, I can’t stop thinking about this question, the question of knowing what we have done, me and my confreres in the Province, in seeking solutions to the problems which the Congo is facing. We preach the Good News, to be sure, and we continue to contribute to the education of the young, the leaders of tomorrow, we hope. Confreres have risked their lives in our parishes in Luofu and Kasando, especially. May they be thanked here for their courage and faith.

But my question this morning deals with the challenges of the massive violations of the rights of persons. Have we raised our voices to condemn these injustices and these crimes against humanity? Of course, we have. I am thinking here of all the Assumptionists who work at Radio Moto. Yes, this pastoral instrument has become “the voice of the voiceless” in order to give importance to the absolute essential. I recommend to your prayers this Lent all those who risk their lives in denouncing, unequivocally, the ills of Congolese society, and do so rooted in the Word of God and the teaching of Fr. d’Alzon. Radio Moto has given itself the task of reminding its listeners that they are not to accept injustices as commonplace or to becoming accomplices, but, rather, to condemn them. Condemning what is evil goes to the heart of Lent’s message. By prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, as Christ has proposed, Lent urges us to be vigilant in all things. Because Lent puts us on the path of creative solidarity with those in need, I invite you all to consider helping Radio Moto as it pursues its mission of bringing a ray of hope to so many who walk in darkness. A simple gift of $20 or $30 could make a world of difference there. You can sponsor a program or a particular broadcast on the rights of women or children or a program of education on matters of peace and justice or even the formation of a young Assumptionist journalist.

May the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Assumption, accompany us on our Lenten journey so that, with her, we might rejoice in the Lord’s Resurrection.

Happy Lent!
Salvator Musande, a.a.
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All gifts for Radio Moto may be sent to the Assumptionists (please indicate clearly the purpose of your gift) at:
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Editor's note: Fr. Salvator is a Congolese Assumptionist who is currently completing an MBA degree at Assumption. He does pastoral ministry with the African communities both in the dioceses of Worcester and Springfield, Massachusetts.