

Encouragement Encouragement

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Passion, Penitence and Progress

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There is no greater reality check than to visit the Holy Land, Israel and Palestine. Having been born there, an accident of history or Providence, I found my Pilgrimage both moving and daunting and certainly challenging. So close to Lent, days after my return I pondered much on the sacred and profane – the real and authentic, and that which has been reconstructed by man to honour and remember but not always, strictly verifiable. However, I was awed by what the life of Jesus really meant and how little we truly understand of His message of Salvation and the price He paid for it.

As it happened the weather was unseasonably very warm and so all was abloom – flowers of deep hues abounded as did blossom trees, olives, banana and fruit trees... Lent is sometimes considered a period of penitence and so it is, but the aim is to have a change of heart, to revitalise, rejuvenate and grow spiritually. The word in English (Anglo Saxon) originates from the word Lencte or springtime. It also relates to Lento which means to slow down or do at a reduced speed often used in Music. It also indicates forty days Jesus spent in the desert to prepare for His mission. Forty is always a significant period in both Christian and Jewish tradition. In order to enter Lent with the intention of truly appreciating both the Death and Resurrection of Jesus it is vital to take all these elements on board – thus to be seriously dedicated to this aim, to reflect on our lives as Christians. It is not merely a time of abstinence but of recommitment, a time to revitalise our faith and grow nearer to God with a purified heart.



THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

In the days before Easter when we prepare and reflect on what Jesus actually did for us and gave us, it is important to consider the cost to Himself and the generosity of the Father and Spirit that sent Him to earth as a 'Humble Man'. Never before had I realised

the actual travelling that Jesus did between one place to another. We do reflect on the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, Mary's visit to help Elizabeth, or during the flight into exile in Egypt, but forget that Jesus walked literally miles from one place to another, to heal, console, teach and correct. Even the distances in Galilee were quite substantial and of course, at times in great heat. What a sight it must have been to see Jesus and his band of Apostles walking through the desert and rough country.

Equally His forty days in the desert was no simple period of fasting and abstinence. The solitude and loneliness, the danger from animals and extremes of temperature would be challenging for even the strongest man. The temptations that He endured would have been accentuated by all these things. The Mount of Temptation is bleak and the approach barren. He did this in preparation for His Mission- to bring Hope, comfort and life to us.

In Lent we try to do little things, not just to do without, but to concentrate on what is truly important in our lives. By our small sacrifices we hope to refocus on why we are here and to strengthen us for our Christian journey. Jesus was consoled by the Angels many times. We are blessed utterly by the fact of Jesus being with us – in Holy Communion and Mass and in each other.

One of the difficulties that we face is that we live in relative comfort and in a culture that does not truly understand self-sacrifice. For in doing 'without' and especially by choice, is seen as rather pointless. Equally commitment is seen as transient and temporary. We do not expect to have a passion for improvement of our lives in the spiritual sense and the good of our neighbour...

Jesus warns us many times to be aware of the lure of evil. In Mark's Gospel (Mk 8 14-21) Jesus chides the Apostles for not understanding what he is about or

'We usually know what we can do, but temptation shows us who we are.' Thomas á Kempis

for not resisting temptation and the corrupting influence of the day. The following is a reflection on the Gospel given by Special Pastor...

There is a saying 'opportunity knocks only once, but temptation bangs on the door for years'. To accumulate material riches is one of the most attractive temptations. But where does the temptation come from? It comes from the primal disorder we all carry within us, and it also comes from the persons and things around us. In today's Gospel Jesus says to His disciples "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod". He was referring to their corrupting influence on the disciples. They demanded from Jesus to show Himself as conqueror, so that they could take Him for the Messiah. They failed to understand that Jesus had not come to build a material kingdom of wealth and power, but one of Truth, Justice and Love.

We live among people who set all their affections on material things. Jesus tells us to beware of them. He is telling us (this morning) that unless we have within us that which is above us we shall soon yield to that which is about/below us. And many people today spend their lives doing exactly that... ' 

Yes, reflecting on what is above and not around us, and beneath us, is most certainly a key aspect of Lent. The better we live Lent the better will be our Joy. At the Resurrection we will not only grow closer to Jesus but we will value what He has shown us and did for us. His Passion revealed the saving grace that He bestowed upon us in every situation. He gave us the opportunity to make amends and restart many times over. He graced us with forgiveness and having carried us in His Passion calls us now to share eternity with Him... He atoned for us – 'made up' for us in our frailty and then graced us with His abiding Presence. He also revealed to us His purpose of uniting us all in His Kingdom which will not change.

Surely all this should encourage us to enter Lent with higher thoughts than merely 'doing without' or being solemn or sullen and begrudging even a few hours spent with Him' prayerfully' (speaking or silent) on how we can become better or more loving.

Sometimes it requires the mockery of others as being considered 'Holy Joes' or 'over the top'. Sometime it may be a little painful. Sometimes we fear that more will be asked of us. Fear not, Jesus said so very often. Ask Jesus to help you and he most certainly will. Be brave and you cannot imagine the ultimate rewards. Make this the best Lent ever. Let us pray...

Halina Holman

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In his description of hell, Dante Alighieri pictures the devil seated on a throne of ice, in frozen and loveless isolation. We might well ask ourselves how it happens that charity can turn cold within us. What are the signs that indicate that our love is beginning to cool? More than anything else, what destroys charity is greed for money, "the root of all evil" The rejection of God and his peace soon follows; we prefer our own desolation rather than the comfort found in his word and the sacraments. All this leads to violence against anyone we think is a threat to our own "certainties": the unborn child, the elderly and infirm, the migrant, the alien among us, or our neighbour who does not live up to our expectations. Creation itself becomes a silent witness to this cooling of charity. The heavens, which in God's plan, were created to sing His praises, are rent by engines raining down implements of death. Love can also grow cold in our own communities. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, I sought to describe the most evident signs of this lack of love: selfishness and spiritual sloth, sterile pessimism, the temptation to self-absorption, constant warring among ourselves, and the worldly mentality that makes us concerned only for appearances, and thus lessens our missionary zeal.

By devoting more time to prayer, (fasting and almsgiving) we enable our hearts to root out our secret lies and forms of self-deception, and then to find the consolation God offers. He is our Father and he wants us to live life well.

Pope Francis, Lenten Message for 2018 (extract)



Feast days in March.

1st St David

4th **Third Sunday of Lent**

6th St Colette

7th St Perpetua & Felicity, 8th St John of God

9th St Frances of Rome 10th St John Ogilvie

11th **Fourth Sunday of Lent**

15th St Louise. 17th St Patrick

18th **Fifth Sunday of Lent**

19th St Joseph

25th **Palm Sunday**

29th **Holy Thursday, The Last Supper...**

30th **Good Friday**

31st **Easter Vigil**

"Because of the increase of iniquity, the love of many will grow cold" (Mt 24: 12)