



Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church

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THE HOMESTEAD

Walking Together Through Lent 2025: A Journey of Renewal

Lent starts on 5 March 2025 and ends on 17 April 2025. As we step into the sacred season of Lent 2025, we are reminded that this is a time not just for solemn reflection, but for spiritual renewal, hope, and togetherness. Lent invites us to walk in the footsteps of Christ - a journey from the wilderness to the ultimate triumph of the Resurrection.

In the hustle and bustle of daily life, it can be easy to lose sight of the profound meaning behind these forty days. Lent is far more than a season of giving up - it is an opportunity to give in to God's love, to give time to prayer, and to give of ourselves to others. It is a call to let go of worldly distractions and refocus our hearts on Christ, embracing the three pillars of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

This year, our theme is "Renewed by Grace, Transformed by Faith." Through communal prayer, acts of charity, and personal sacrifice, we seek to deepen our relationship with God and with one another. Let us not see fasting as a deprivation, but as a reminder of our dependence on God's sustenance. Let almsgiving become an extension of our gratitude for His abundant blessings, as we share what we have with those in need.

Lent is also a time to rediscover hope in the face of challenges. Just as Christ journeyed through the desert, facing trials and temptations, so too do we encounter difficulties that test our faith. Yet, Lent reassures us that our struggles are not the end of the story. Through repentance and reconciliation, we open our hearts to His boundless mercy and prepare ourselves to experience the joy of Easter with renewed spirits.

As we move through this holy season as a parish family, let us encourage one another in our Lenten commitments and uplift each other with prayer and kindness. Whether you are joining the Stations of the Cross, participating in our community outreach efforts, or simply finding moments of stillness to connect with God, remember that this journey is not one we walk alone.

May Lent 2025 bring us closer to Christ, strengthen our faith, and renew the bonds of love within our parish community. Together, let us prepare our hearts for the glorious celebration of Easter, carrying the light of Christ into the world.

"You will let me hear gladness and joy; the bones you have crushed will rejoice." (Psalm 51:10)



By: Sr. Victoria Victorino, pddm

“Let us journey together in hope.”



This is the title of the Lenten Message of Pope Francis in this Jubilee Year 2025. And he develops his reflection on this theme by taking the key words: 1) To Journey, 2) Together, and 3) In Hope

To Journey

Obviously, the Pope's reflection is connected to the Jubilee motto, “Pilgrims of Hope.” But this time, he puts it in the context of the Lenten season which started on 5 March, Ash Wednesday. Lent is the privileged moment of conversion and change of life. Pope Francis reflects, “A *first call to conversion thus comes from the realization that **all of us are pilgrims in this life**; each of us is invited to stop and ask how our lives reflect this fact. Am I really on a journey, or am I standing still, not moving, either immobilized by fear and hopelessness or reluctant to move out of my comfort zone?*”

Pope Francis then makes a practical suggestion which I find quite interesting. He says, “*it would be a good Lenten exercise for us to compare our daily life with that of some migrant or foreigner, to learn how to sympathize with their experiences and in this way discover what God is asking of us so that we can better advance on our journey to the house of the Father. This would be a good “examination of conscience” for all of us wayfarers.*” Indeed, it could be a challenge to put ourselves in the shoes of some migrants, to be aware that we are always in some ‘border-crossing process,’ not truly at home in the place where we are, because our true home is somewhere else.

Together

Journeying together is not easy; it calls for concrete act of conversion, of shelving the self, as it were, so that one can go in rhythm with the others' pace. I guess, many of us have heard the proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Pope Francis gives these practical points: “*This Lent, God is asking us to examine whether in our lives, in our families, in the places where we work and spend our time, we are capable of walking together with others, listening to them, resisting the temptation to become self-absorbed and to think only of our own needs. Let us ask ourselves in the presence of the Lord whether, as bishops, priests, consecrated persons and laity in the service of the Kingdom of God, we cooperate with others. Whether we show ourselves welcoming, with concrete gestures, to those both near and far. Whether we make others feel a part of the community or keep them at a distance.*” In short, the Pope is asking us to respond to the summons to synodality.

In Hope

The key text of the Jubilee Year is “*Hope does not disappoint.*” (see Rom 5:5) But we often sense a strong sense of hopelessness in our society today. It is as if we did not learn anything during the Covid years; we have forgotten God's gracious protection and accompaniment, his assurance that he is with us always. Hence, Pope Francis reminds us: “*This, then, is the third call to conversion: a call to hope, to trust in God and his great promise of eternal life. Let us ask ourselves: Am I convinced that the Lord forgives my sins? Or do I act as if I can save myself? Do I long for salvation and call upon God's help to attain it? Do I concretely experience the hope that enables me to interpret the events of history and inspires in me a commitment to justice and fraternity, to care for our common home and in such a way that no one feels excluded?*”

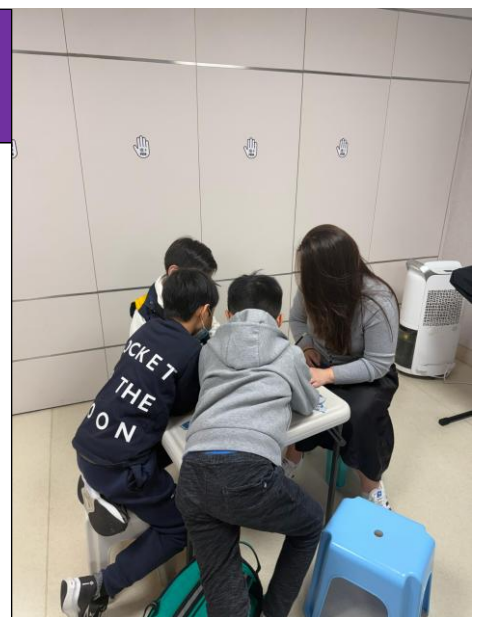
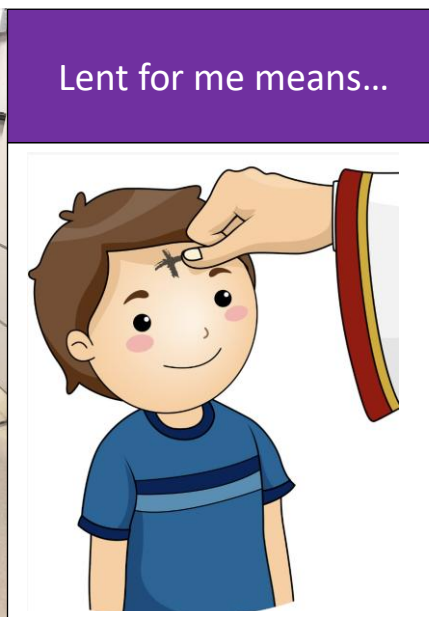
As we draw closer to the celebration of Easter, let us reflect on these pointers given by Pope Francis in his Lenten message. May we truly journey together in hope as families and communities. May we strengthen each other by the bond of faith and charity, lifting up our hearts in prayer to God that he may bless our efforts to renew our lives and contribute to the building up of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Keep Your Eyes On Jesus

By: Teacher Levinna Natalia

The kids in the English Sunday School Level 2 class learned about the temptation of Jesus and His miracles as we prepare for the Lenten season. We introduced the meaning of Lent and encouraged them to make Lenten promises by giving up something that they truly enjoy, embodying the spirit of Lent and resisting temptations.

We learned about Jesus' miracles: calming the storm, multiplying bread and fish, healing the sick, and raising the dead. We played some games called "Keep Your Eyes on Jesus," where the kids needed to finish tasks while keeping their eyes on Jesus. The game serves as a reminder that although it can be challenging to keep your eyes and heart on Jesus, especially in the midst of temptation, but life is always richer and more fulfilling with Jesus by your side. We hope to carry the spirit of "keeping our eyes and hearts on Jesus" throughout this Lenten season and beyond.





Pilgrims of Hope. A reflection on the Cardinal's visit to our Home, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church.

By: Sally Ho

My Home

I have started to be in this community since the end of COVID. I am not one to easily want to settle in a community because I look for a community that can live out the gospel message. At OLMC we are being guided to follow Christ and how to live out the gospel in the current state of the world.

I see truly the love and care our Pastor has for his community and the society of HK as he tries his very best to ensure everyone is welcomed and that everyone is equal. We are all sinners therefore; he also has his flaws. There is so much thought put into our activities, liturgy and holding a community together where everybody feels at home. The amount of formation, care and love that is given to the Filipino community who serves our Hong Kong families is truly touching in our church. Fr Law and his team try their best to ensure that we all treat each other as family members within the church.

Cardinal's Visit

I did not know what to expect for this visit, as it seemed as though members of each serving teams were invited to meet with Cardinal Chow and his pastoral team by having dinner chats. I appreciated the gesture from the parish council for this opportunity to have a close and transparent meeting with them.

Our parish team showed all the activities OLMC beginning with the works of charity and other projects responding to the needs of our community, including church renovation and so forth. Towards the end of the visit, I realized that the session was also like an organisation evaluation, hence the need for the Cardinal to mention some things that needs improvement in our parish. In the end, I found myself agreeing with Fr. Law that in the church, yes there is a management side for implementation of systems for organisation operation.

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However, the pastoring part is most important. And I believe that many of the faithful from various parts of Hong Kong come to OLMC (including myself) because ours is truly a welcoming Church, where we truly feel 'at home.' We understand our flaws as a Catholic church to be less warm and welcoming to our protestant brothers and sisters. However, I see that in OLMC we try to be different.

Place for improvement, not only in OLMC, but as members of the Church

The Cardinal spoke about a healthy, synod and discerning church. This makes me ask "How can the church be truly walking together in discernment?" First, we must understand "what is discernment? What does it entail?" Pope Francis said in his Catechesis of Discernment in August 2022:

"...because the theme of discernment is very important in order to know what is going on within us. To know about our feelings ideas, we have to discern where they come from, where they lead me, to what decisions — and today we focus on the first of its fundamental elements, which is prayer. To discern we need to be in an environment, in a state of prayer."

I am sure we can all agree on prayer as one dimension that is a necessary part for discernment as stated by Pope Francis. And perhaps, this is where we can still grow as individual and as a church community.

I attended a prayer workshop that was led by Bishop Ha last year where the organizers did a live survey on google form in Chinese, with 140 respondents. Some results: only 8% of respondents said that they pray always, and pray together with their family; 60% said they seldom or never pray with their family. Furthermore, on the forms of prayer methods used, 68% of the participants say they like recitation of rosary and the Our Father. However, prayer forms such as Liturgy of the hours, Lectio Divina, Examen, Meditation, Adoration were all below 20%.

Therefore, I see that there is a need for us to grow more in prayer, in truly listening to the voice of God, which is the basic attitude needed for deep and authentic discernment. And in connection with this, I truly believe that we ourselves need to be evangelized, to learn more about our Catholic faith. We need to learn to ask questions and not feel stupid and condemned.

Moreover, I truly sense the lack of conversion in our hearts, that is, how to allow ourselves to be truly touched by God's love. I would like to propose the notion that the society is the way it is, partly due to the fact that the Catholic church has forgotten the ministry of healing and deliverance of people from traumatic strongholds and bondages. Even some clergy have to be convinced that there is an ongoing spiritual warfare. We need to be equipped as the church body, with the armour of God, so we can truly defend ourselves in such battle.

Pilgrims of Hope, especially with the Young People

It is my hope that all of us may value the presence of the young people and truly love them, not only out of fear of not having enough vocations for the priestly and consecrated life. Our present journey as 'pilgrims of hope' in this Jubilee Year, can be a privileged moment to deeply 'think through' what is the hope that the church can bring and what truly is the gospel message of hope, especially for our young people today. Is it just the large events that we should organize or should we be addressing the core issues of our society such as the lack of peace, the increase in suicides and the factors that are contributing to people looking for new age spirituality as means for peace and happiness?

How to provide light in the darkness is what Jesus came to do. The question I ask myself and which I would like to share to our church is: 'Are we, as a church, ready to face darkness in order that we can help to set free the people-in-darkness? Or are we avoiding darkness because it is also too much for us to face as body of the Church?



Whispers of Spring Breeze

By: Vania Wahyudi

On April 4th, I had the chance to join OLMC for their third pilgrimage to Our Lady of Fatima in Cheung Chau. Having lived in Hong Kong for almost seven years, I felt a bit embarrassed admitting it was my first-time visiting Cheung Chau. Still, I was grateful to share this experience with one of the loveliest communities I've ever known.

This pilgrimage turned out to be more of an extended reflection for me, especially since I had just returned from the original Fatima in Portugal two weeks earlier. After getting back to Hong Kong the Sunday before, I decided to join this trip to Cheung Chau at the last minute. It felt surreal to find myself in a mini Fatima here in Hong Kong after walking the sacred grounds of Portugal. I realized that my journey in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima might have deepened my experience in Cheung Chau, allowing me to reflect even more on its significance.

In Fatima, Our Lady appeared to three children in 1917, sharing messages of repentance, prayer, and hope. This made me think about my own spiritual journey and the need for a childlike faith—emptying myself to fill up with the Word of God. While this is, of course, often easier said than done amidst the vibrant hustle and bustle of Hong Kong, I find that returning to this Pearl of the Orient city reminds me of my ongoing homework in faith.

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When we arrived in Cheung Chau at around 10 in the morning, I was captivated by the peaceful surroundings near the church. The beach nearby made it feel like a scene from a movie, like someone's childhood neighborhood in a Korean drama. The church, connected to a kindergarten, featured colorful murals likely created by the kids, adding to the vibrant atmosphere.

Living in Hong Kong, I often find myself, like many others, becoming desensitized to God's words. I used to approach pilgrimages with a checklist of intentions, treating God more like a genie than a Father. But during this pilgrimage in Cheung Chau, I shifted my focus with a simple prayer: "God, please search my heart. I know You are here, You hear me, and You see me. You know what I want and need, and You understand my thoughts even better than I do. Strengthen my good desires if they align with Your will, and take away anything in my heart that might lead me away from You."

I feel like true enlightenment doesn't happen overnight; it comes through a balance of dialogue with God, nature, and others. God speaks to us in many ways, but recognizing His voice takes discernment through prayer. This pilgrimage reminded me that such experiences are sacred moments to cherish, not just everyday occurrences.

Ultimately, for me personally, pilgrimage is about recognizing God's constant presence, much like the gentle "whisper of spring breeze" this season brings. Every challenge I face becomes a way to communicate with Him, the Father who knows and provides for me, urging me to seek understanding rather than to complain. The essence of a true pilgrimage lies not in searching for God, but in the beautiful realization that He is always in my heart. Just as the spring breeze brings renewal and hope, my journey to Cheung Chau also served as a gentle reminder of this truth, reminding me to carry His love and presence beyond the pilgrimage.



Thank you Lord

Holy Week: A Sacred Journey to the Cross and Beyond

As the most profound moment of the liturgical year approaches, Holy Week beckons us to enter into the mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. It is a time when we are invited to journey alongside Him, to reflect deeply on His unfathomable love, and to renew our faith in the promise of redemption.

The week begins with **Palm Sunday**, as we honor Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Holding palm branches, we rejoice, yet we know this path leads to ultimate sacrifice. The procession is not just a reenactment - it is a spiritual invitation to follow Christ, wherever He leads.

Holy Thursday carries us to the Upper Room, where Jesus humbles Himself in service, washing the disciples' feet and offering the gift of the Eucharist. On this sacred day, we are reminded that to love as He loves, we must serve others with humility and compassion.

The somber reverence of **Good Friday** draws us to the Cross, where Jesus freely gives His life for our salvation. Through the Stations of the Cross and the Passion narrative, we are invited to meditate on His suffering and to recognize the depth of His love for humanity.

On **Holy Saturday**, the quiet of the tomb surrounds us, yet hope flickers in the darkness. It is a day of waiting, as we prepare to celebrate the glory that is to come.

Finally, **Easter Sunday** bursts forth in triumphant joy as we proclaim the Risen Christ. The empty tomb is a testament to the victory of life over death, of hope over despair. This day of resurrection fills our hearts with renewed faith and calls us to carry His light into the world.

As we approach **Holy Week**, let us prepare our hearts to embrace its solemnity and joy. Let us walk this sacred path with humility, gratitude, and love, knowing that the story does not end at the Cross—it begins anew with the Resurrection.

"He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." (Philippians 2:8-9)

May this Holy Week inspire us to deepen our connection to Christ and renew our commitment to share His love and light in every aspect of life.

Holy Week

13 April – Palm Sunday
17 April – Maundy Thursday
18 April – Good Friday
19 April – Easter Vigil
20 April – Easter Sunday



Holy Week



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