

Lent will be soon be upon us and Ash Wednesday this year is March 5th . This is a good time to consider what we are being called to do especially as this is a jubilee year.

PREPARING FOR LENT

Lent is such a blessed time of the year and there are so many graces available that it is worth preparing a plan for the season so that we reach the Paschal Mysteries with our hearts and minds made clean. Here are a few suggestions:

- 1) This might not be your first thought but **SILENCE**. Reduce the time spend on social media, internet etc and cultivate a listening heart. Without silence the work God will be able to do in your heart will be limited.
- 2) **YES TO TRUST – NO TO WORRY**. Try and plan this carefully as trust is so important; it is foundational. But we all tend to suffer from anxiety and fear etc but we need to put it aside. Again I recommend the Surrender Novena and a small book by St Louis de Montfort "Friends of the Cross."
- 3) **FASTING**. Yes officially the only days of fasting in the whole year are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. But fasting is so important – it purifies the soul and together with prayer and alms giving it is so powerful before God. It doesn't have to be severe at all. Fasting from media etc as above is a really productive fast. Try simply not to eat between meals at least on some days of the week.
- 4) **PRAYER** – We have been talking a lot about prayer since it is the year of prayer and so use Lent wisely to pray a bit more deeply if we can't manage more time. Pray from the heart – quality is much more important than quantity. Especially **MEDITATE ON THE PASSION**.
- 5) Some **SPIRITUAL READING**. Learn more about the faith.
- 6) **MAKE A GOOD CONFESSION REGULARLY**



The grace of a Lent that leads us to greater attentiveness to God and to the least among us and to allow God to teach us how to listen as he does.

Pope Leo

Lent is a time in which the Church, guided by a sense of maternal care, invites us to place the mystery of God back in the centre of our lives.

Pope Leo

Let us strive to make our communities places where the cry of those who suffer finds welcome, and listening opens paths towards liberation, making us ready and eager to contribute to building a civilization of love.

Pope Leo

To ask for the strength that comes from the type of fasting that also extends to our use of language, so that hurtful words may diminish and give way to a greater space for the voice of others.

Pope Leo

Dear Faithful,

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of our Lenten journey to the great Paschal Mysteries. I think the key word we should ponder is "Journey." In light of this I would strongly recommend reading the Book of Exodus; for this book narrates the journey of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the promised land. But it is also much more; it is a spiritual journey which teaches us many things. Firstly, although we know the destination – heaven (and in our Lenten journey we could add conversion of the heart and a second baptism on Divine Mercy Sunday) – we don't know how God will lead us and what route it will take. It is very important that we don't confine the powerful work God wants to do in our souls – we must allow him complete freedom to act as He sees fit. So often our Lenten journey becomes preoccupied with our Lenten penances that we forget the greater work God wishes to do of which our penances are symbols. We could call this work a heart transplant. If we surrender our heart to him, he will make it one with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Therefore, I suggest this Lent to be completely open to what God wants to do – not what we think he should do.

The journey of the Israelites was only meant to take fifty days but because of the hardness of their heart, it took forty years and only two completed the journey. This is why it is so important that we realise that **the major work of our spiritual journey is to submit our will and the powers of our soul (intellect and memory) to God's Will**. This is the sole purpose of the Christian journey: Obedience to the will of God.

Secondly, what the Israelites lacked was TRUST. They simply did not trust that God knew what he was doing – just like Adam and Eve – so at every step of the way they hindered his plans for them and they were always complaining. Two weeks ago we emphasised the need to start our journey empty like the great water jars at Cana. We must start from nothingness, from our very weakness – as Saint Paul gloried in his very weakness. But we must add to that complete and absolute trust. The smaller we are, the greater our sinfulness, the greater our addictions, problems etc, the more we can rely on the power of God. This as Saint Therese taught is the time for little souls.

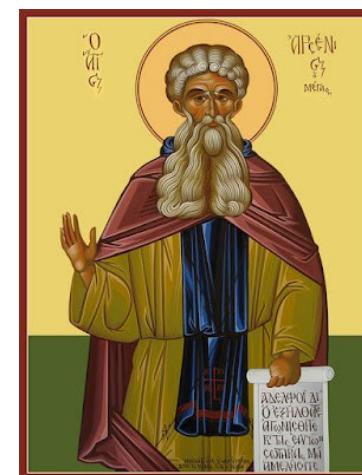
God can accomplish anything in a soul that trusts and very little in souls that distrust. We must have on our lips, "Jesus I trust in you." He is going to do the work, not us and since he is all powerful there is nothing that he cannot do in our souls provided we do not impede his action and we trust. If we remove the small pebble of our will, his grace will do the rest little by little. Jesus told Saint Faustina, "*If souls would put themselves completely in my care, I Myself would undertake the task of sanctifying them, and I would lavish even greater graces upon them.*" (1682)

It takes courage to surrender to Jesus because it is necessary that we surrender everything – all control, all anxiety, all worry, all our burdens, all our plans – everything. This is what Jesus told his disciples in a phrase that Saint John Paul II loved "Put out into the deep."

What are going to be our aids in this journey? Firstly, a devotion to Divine Mercy for this is the grace that he wishes to give us and is the grace for our times. We have to trust completely in his merciful Sacred Heart for it was from this that the blood and water poured out on Calvary. Secondly, devotion to Mary. We receive God's graces through Mary and so we need to be devoted to her, especially in praying the rosary daily. The rosary is our great weapon in the spiritual battle of Lent.

Lastly, we must seek the Face of Christ which is our Bishop's episcopal motto. Where better can we do this than in adoration? During Lent, I wish to increase the times where this is possible.

So choose your Lenten penances wisely for these dispose us to receive God's grace but remember above all this is a journey of surrender – we want to hand ourselves over to God to be remade. In Matthew 11 when Jesus says "Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened I will give you rest" the literal meaning is Come to me and I will REMAKE you. So let us prepare with complete trust that God wants (more than we want) to take our nothingness and to fill it not simply with water but with the most inebriating wine. *Fiat!*



"Arsenius, flee, be silent and pray always for these are the sources of sinlessness."

This would be a good way of self examination on our Lenten journey. Do we flee the world? Do we listen? Do we pray?

St Arsenius, Desert Father