



Parish Priest: Rev. Mgr. John M Walsh

Parish: Our Lady of Compassion

Tel No: 07104 873230

Email: ourladyofcompassionformby@rcaol.org.uk

Web: ourladyofcompassionformby.org.uk

13 Feb 2021

Dear Friends

I heard it said recently that the past year of the pandemic has been 'the longest Lent in living memory'. I understand the remark. But if we have been living through the longest Lent in living memory, perhaps we can expect the greatest resurrection experience too!

The Christian season of Lent is about to begin. I have found that it is a poorly understood period of time. No matter how hard we try, we cannot shake off all those negative thoughts about punishing ourselves, giving things up, embarking on an endurance race, or anxiously counting down the days until it is all over. No wonder we shiver as Lent approaches year after year.

Not that I want to reduce Lent to an irrelevant, innocuous time with little meaning. I would be talking myself out of a job! No. Lent is not an end in itself, a chance to get a little more religious, a time for uncomfortable consciences, to make things difficult for myself. It is a huge opportunity that is often missed and too quickly passes us by. So how can we understand Lent a little better?

It is, first and foremost, a time of preparation for the celebration of the great Easter Festival. At the heart of Easter is the deep conviction and belief that Christ rose from the dead and is alive. Life overcomes death. Light overcomes darkness. But, as nature teaches us, new life is always preceded by dying. Dying is a preparation, a door, a promise.

The most difficult dying is not the moment of our death, but the dying to all that seeks to place me at the centre of my own life and keep me there. It is the slow and difficult shedding of those habits, ways of life and attitudes that trap me in the delusion that it is only me that matters. My comfort, my life, my needs. Dying to self is quite simply necessary for new life, the life that never ends.

This is why the Church chooses the desert experience of Jesus that we find in the Gospels. We are told he spent forty days in the wilderness. Hence the forty days of Lent. He was tempted to put himself first, to make himself the centre of attention. But he emerges with one clear focus; to carry out the mission entrusted to him by his Father; to preach the Good News, to heal the sick, to die that all may be reconciled to his Father who now becomes our Father, to rise again.

What has all that to do with me? It all sounds a bit lofty perhaps, or somewhat remote. Well, I hope it may be a little clearer now. Lent is about Jesus. Easter is about Jesus. The Christian faith is about Jesus. Without him, Lent, Easter and Christianity make no sense at all. There are hundreds of great self improvement programmes out there that will be of greater help to us than forty days of self punishment and growing frustration! But Lent is about a person.



Our Lady of Compassion

18 School Lane, Formby, L37 3LW

Served by the Churches of Our Lady of Compassion and St. Jerome

Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Trustees In. Reg. Charity No: 232709



Parish Priest: Rev. Mgr. John M Walsh

Parish: Our Lady of Compassion

Tel No: 07104 873230

Email: ourladyofcompassionformby@rcaol.org.uk

Web: ourladyofcompassionformby.org.uk

Page 2

One who knows me, who draws near to me and calls me by my name. One who walks with me through my own very real wilderness. One who makes sense of everything. Lent is simply the opportunity to look at my faith again, find a new understanding, a new way to engage.

If we have learned anything during this dreadful pandemic, it is surely that life is fragile and short. Our priorities have moved into sharper focus and having learned our limitations, we want to look at the new reality around us. So many previous certainties have gone. Now we have an opportunity to reassess and regroup.

The forty days of Lent are inviting us to ask ourselves; am I prepared to meet Jesus, to speak with him, to listen to him. Am I prepared to be honest about my doubts and my struggles with faith? Am I prepared to begin again, to grow, to trust, to let go? The wilderness is not just some exotic place we read of in the Gospel or watch on TV. It's a place we all know very well. It is within every human being and we have been wandering in it for the past year!

This year, we have the opportunity to live the best Lent of our lives. If we are not ready for it now, we never will be! Sadly, we will not be in church on Ash Wednesday. But we will be in our domestic church, the church of our family, the church of our home. Each one of us. There will be blessed ashes available for us to collect from a container outside St Jerome's church or Our Lady's Presbytery this Tuesday. Collect them. Take them home. Watch the live stream of Mass on Ash Wednesday at 12 noon and we can place the ashes on ourselves and our loved ones. Or simply have a little moment at home with a prayer and the placing of ashes. If you cannot obtain ashes, a simple sign of the cross on the forehead will do.

Let us begin the Forty days together on Wednesday. Let's make it real, sincere, a moment to meet Jesus and stay with him. Let this be our one, simple resolution for Lent. To walk with Jesus and to come to know him better. Then those things which need to die, that need to change will become clear. With his help, new life is possible. And that great resurrection that I spoke of at the beginning of this letter will become a reality for each one of us.

I wish you all a truly blessed, fruitful Lent.

May God bless you and your loved ones.

Father John



Our Lady of Compassion

18 School Lane, Formby, L37 3LW

Served by the Churches of Our Lady of Compassion and St. Jerome
Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Trustees In. Reg. Charity No: 232709