



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

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Dear Friends

LENT BEGINS

Like every opportunity that is given to us to move forward and to grow, time passes quickly and the opportunity passes. Forty days may sound like a long period of time. But it too passes and before we know it, Easter is upon us.

Have you made any resolutions for Lent this year? Perhaps you have returned to the same resolutions as in previous years, perhaps something new. Maybe you have decided to give up giving things up and taken on something extra instead. Perhaps we are doing nothing specific for Lent this year, maybe a little tired, discouraged or even a little cynical!

It is good to make an effort, to show willing. But if we are trying too hard, then something is not right. Perhaps it is time to pause and reflect. During my homily at Mass on Ash Wednesday, I wanted to impress on us all that God who is love is at the heart, not only of our Lenten journey, but of our Faith and life itself. To believe that we are truly loved and cherished by God can be the hardest thing of all. Yet it is essential to everything we do as Christians.

Could this be the best Lenten resolution of all? The simplest, yet the hardest? To open ourselves to this amazing truth that we are loved and cherished by God! It may sound very unusual, a little too generalised, too little. After all, what benefit will it bring me? Less alcohol, tobacco, sweets will make me healthier. There is a clear benefit. But this sounds a little too vague, a little distant. Therein lies the problem. How quickly we buy into the idea that we have to somehow prove ourselves to God, obtain His favour, catch His attention. The harder the resolution, the greater the benefit. In the end we achieve next to nothing, at least in our relationship with the God who is our Father.

If we want to take Lent seriously, then simple is best. If we really want to move closer to God, or more accurately, allow Him to draw closer to us, then we have to begin by asking what God wants. What pleases Him? The first reading on Ash Wednesday gives us an indication; 'let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn'. In other words, grand gestures and bold resolutions mean little to God if they are empty of love for Him, if they treat Him as an afterthought. It is love that matters.

God takes delight in the simplest act of love. Giving to the poor, welcoming the stranger, denying myself a particular pleasure to help me say 'no' to myself, spending more time in prayer, reading the Scriptures, striving to be more charitable to my neighbour. Whatever I choose to do in these Forty days, if done with love and a real desire to draw closer to God, then we please Him. But let it be simple and straightforward.



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18 School Lane, Formby, L37 3LW

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

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Love calls for love. Earlier today I recorded the Way of the Cross at St Jerome's church where our live streaming cameras can pick up each individual Station. It was recorded so that, at any time during this Lenten journey, you can return to it as often as you wish and follow it closely. To reflect often on this last sorrowful journey of Jesus is a powerful help to focus our minds on what it means to be loved by him. Just a small understanding of his sufferings for us is enough to make us realise that when God tells us that He loves us, He really means it!

Another opportunity has been given to each one of us this Lent. Time is passing. Let's keep it simple and get straight down to it. I want to grow, move forward, improve. Why? So that my love becomes more genuine, more sincere, focussed completely on the One who loved us first and who invites us to consider the price of that love; Jesus. May these Forty days be a time of joyful growth for us all.

May God bless you and your loved ones.

Father John



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