

QUINQUAGESIMA – 2002

Sirach 27:4-7

1Cor 15:54-58

Lk 6:39-45

Today is Quinquagesima Sunday, 50 days before Easter. It announces the coming of Lent when we are urged to dive deeper into living out the Paschal Mystery in our lives. Lent is a season of prayer, fasting and generosity in giving our time, talents and money to those who need them. We begin this season by putting ashes on our heads not to send ourselves on a massive guilt trip, but to remind us to open our eyes, ears, hearts and hands to the mystery of the One who is Love.

Our first reading today tells us that our conversation and demeanour are what makes our goodness and righteousness visible. Jesus and the apostles also point out that our actions are a measure of our faith. If Lent is about our focussing on the Paschal Mystery, what is it? It is the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The prophets of old looked forward to God's salvation which was won for us through the self-offering of Jesus. The Paschal Mystery is why we believe that the eternal life of God's Kingdom is able to grow in our lives now, so we will be ready to receive it in its fulness at the Last Judgement.

The Paschal mystery is to be lived out in our lives every day. We may know that in our heads, but life can be so distracting we push it to one side. Lent enables us to re-focus and readjust the direction in our lives. When we became members of Christ at our baptism we did not join a social club. We became participants in his suffering, death and resurrection.

Lent is a season when we can focus on what the cost of discipleship really is. 'Growth' is a buzz word in the gospels and Lent is when we work out what we need to grow spiritually. Lent is not about self-help or self-improvement. Our focus must be on God, not self. Neither is it about giving up on treats or substituting whisky with gin. Pope Francis suggests we cut down on social media usage. Neither is it trying to get our act together in life and become more organised. All these things are good things but they are not the reason for Lent.

Lent is about deepening our knowledge *of* and our relationship *with* God through Jesus our wounded healer. God loves us and waits for us to invite him to be the focus of our lives. As the psalmist says, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God" (Ps 42:1). The desire may be there, but action is needed.

"Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20-21). We may desire God but we also need to realise that he is already grasping us through Jesus who was born to be a witness to God's truth. It is we who must open the door.

Lent points to and leads us to Holy Week, not so we can breathe a sigh of relief that all our disciplines are over, but so we can celebrate the new hope of Jesus' victory over evil and death as purified and re-formed disciples. That may make us feel like happy little vegemites, but disciples are also evangelists. As Jesus says in his Sermon on the Plain, "Can the blind

lead the blind?" "Can a rotten tree produce good fruit?" No, the impure cannot lead the impure to purity. A sound tree does not produce rotten fruit. Lent is the season when we must pull out the plank in our own eye so that we can see clearly to lead and mentor those who have splinters in theirs, to know and love God.

As St Paul reminds us, Jesus' victory over evil is ours to receive. Despite all, we must never despair, never give in or give up, because we know that if we focus on Jesus, all of our ministries will bear fruit.

Lent beckons us. On Ash Wednesday let us join the poet and priest George Herbert and say, 'Welcome dear feast of Lent, who loves not thee, He loves not Temperance, or authority, But is composed of passion.'

Msgr Harry Entwistle
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