

The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's Lent Message 2021



13 February 2021

Dear Friends,

We shall soon be approaching the anniversary of the first lockdown—23 March, just before the Annunciation last year—and we'll be looking back over an unprecedented year of disruption to our daily lives, not experienced outside wartime. Among the most serious disruptions have been those to the Church's public worship, and to the deep rhythms of our individual religious experience, not experienced by almost any previous generation of Christians in this country. All the people of God, whether ordained and non-ordained, have had to depend on more or less unsatisfactory ways of praying, worshipping God, and offering ourselves and receiving him in the Sacraments. Now, as we place all our hope in the vaccination programme as our pathway out of the present (and to many people the most difficult) period of lockdown, we find ourselves on the threshold of Lent, that period every year as we approach Easter, when we are instructed to spend some time in self-examination.

Whatever the special challenges of the pandemic and lockdown, *it is still true* that the season of Lent is about *penitence*. And penitence *always* requires us to see *ourselves* more clearly in the light of God's holiness and justice. That is true this year like every year. From 17 February, Ash Wednesday, each of us begins again, at the foot of the Cross, recognising that the death of Our Lord is first and foremost *my* business, the result of *my* betrayals, *my* sins. Only as you or I face up to this truth can we begin to open ourselves up to the good news we will hear at Easter – that the debt is paid, the prison doors are unlocked. What I couldn't do for myself, God in Christ *has done for me and done in me*. When I *know* myself, I know how *weak* I am; and *that*, as St Paul says, is when we start to use *God's strength*. I receive into my broken self the deathless life of Our Risen Lord.

All of us in the parishes of The Society will be making this *same journey* in the weeks ahead. Indeed it's a journey very familiar to all Christ's disciples, his *learners*: going to the places of *our weakness*, so that there we may encounter the *strength and life of God*. For a relatively short spell (it's only six weeks! so there's no need to panic) we are asked to *look within* and find the roots of the world's disaster *in us*; not to search for them outside, and pin the blame on others or on unbelievers.

All our hearts are *still on the way* to full conversion, and so the work of the Cross, finished in itself once and for all on Calvary, is *still working itself through* in the life of each Christian. Lent is our best opportunity to let God move more deeply and permanently into the areas of our lives that still resist His grace. And it is something we do by prayer, fasting, and being more sacrificial.

During this period I hope that we shall be continuing to think and pray about the challenges that face The Society as a body, our relation to others in the Church of England, and to the global body of the Church catholic. I hope that they will give us a chance to know ourselves better, so that we can more fully encounter the grace and gift of Christ crucified.

But this brings us back to where we started. Self-examination and self-knowledge are needed by *all of us*, and I trust that this Lent will be a time of spiritual refreshment that will help us find out more of *what we need*, and how to open ourselves to what *God seeks to give*. We must pray together that The Society will become a deeper fellowship in which, *knowing* our weakness, we can *gain* the strength of God in our lives, and become more and more eager to share the Easter Gospel in a world of suffering and sin.

I hope that you will find the daily devotions below helpful. May God bless you and keep you safe.

I Daily Gospel Readings

These are the daily Gospel readings for the Eucharist on each day of Lent

LENT and Holy WEEK Gospels			
FEB 17	Wed	Ash Wednesday	Matthew 6.1–6. 16–18
18	Thur	Weekday of Lent	Luke 9.22–25
19	Fri	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 9.14–15
20	Sat	Weekday of Lent <i>Commem. Ss Francisco and Jacinta de Jesus Marto</i>	Luke 5.27–32
21	Sun	1 st Sunday of Lent	Mark 1.12–15
22	Mon	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 25.31–46
23	Tues	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 6.7–15
24	Wed	Weekday of Lent	Luke 11.29–32
25	Thur	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 7.7–12
26	Fri	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 5.20–26
27	Sat	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 5.43–48
28	Sun	2 nd Sunday of Lent	Mark 9.2–10
MAR 1	Mon	Weekday of Lent	Luke 6.36–38
2	Tues	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 23.1–12
3	Wed	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 20.17–28
4	Thur	Weekday of Lent	Luke 16.19–31
5	Fri	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 21.33–43, 45–46
6	Sat	Weekday of Lent	Luke 15.1–3, 11–32
7	Sun	3 rd Sunday of Lent	John 2.13–25
8	Mon	Weekday of Lent	Luke 4.24–30
9	Tues	Weekday of Lent	Luke 4.24–30
10	Wed	Weekday of Lent	Matthew 5.17–19
11	Thur	Weekday of Lent	Luke 11.14–23

12	Fri	Weekday of Lent	Mark 12.28–34
13	Sat	Weekday of Lent	Luke 18.9–14
14	Sun	4 th Sunday of Lent	John 3.14–21
15	Mon	Weekday of Lent	John 4. 43–54
16	Tues	Weekday of Lent	John 5.1–3, 5–16
17	Wed	Weekday of Lent	John 5.17–30
18	Thur	Weekday of Lent	John 5.31–47
19	Fri	St Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Matthew 1.16, 18–21, 24
20	Sat	Weekday of Lent	John 7.40–52
21	Sun	5 th Sunday of Lent	John 12.20–33
22	Mon	Weekday of Lent	John 8.1–11
23	Tues	Weekday of Lent	John 8.21–30
24	Wed	Weekday of Lent	John 8.31–42
25	Thur	The Annunciation of the Lord	Luke 1.26–38
26	Fri	Weekday of Lent	John 10.31–42
27	Sat	Weekday of Lent	John 11.45–56
28	Sun	Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord	Mark 11.1–10 Mark 14.1–15.47
29	Mon	Monday of Holy Week	John 12.1–11
30	Tues	Tuesday of Holy Week	John 13.21–33, 33–38
31	Wed	Wednesday of Holy Week	Matthew 26.14–25
APRIL 1	Thur	Maundy Thursday	John 13. 1–15
2	Fri	Good Friday	John 18.1 – 19.42
3	Sat	Holy Saturday	Mark 16. 1–7
4	Sun	EASTER DAY	John 20. 1–9

2 Rosary Meditations ‘of Holy Week’ (St John Eudes)

Those of you who are familiar with the Rosary will be able to use the following pattern easily.

First Holy Week Mystery / Monday: The Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem / St John 12.12–19

Second Holy Week Mystery / Tuesday: The Anointing at Bethany / St Matthew 26.6–13

Third Holy Week Mystery / Wednesday: The Institution of the Eucharist / St Mark 14.22–26

Fourth Holy Week Mystery / Thursday: The Crucifixion of Jesus / St John 19.18–30

Fifth Holy Week Mystery / Friday: The Death and Burial of the Lord / St Matthew 27.57–60

Those who are unfamiliar with it may prefer to meditate on just one ‘mystery’ (one moment in the life of the Lord) per weekday, Monday to Friday. Better to say one decade of the Rosary prayerfully than the whole mechanically. If you don’t own a Rosary perhaps buy one, but you have ten fingers!

First, find a place and a time of day when you can be quiet and still to pray.

- Begin by saying ‘*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen*’, crossing yourself.
- Then read the reading from Scripture for the day (above)
- Then ‘*Our Father who art ... deliver us from evil*’;
- Followed by the ‘*Hail Mary ... hour of our death*’ ten times (a decade – once on each bead),
- Ending with ‘*Glory be to the Father ... Amen.*’
- You may then add an optional prayer—‘*O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell; lead all souls to heaven and especially those most in need of thy mercy.*’— and then this final prayer:

O God, whose only-begotten Son, by His life, death and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life; grant, we beseech Thee, that we, meditating upon these mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may imitate what they contain, and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

3 Two prayers for daily use

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

O MY GOD, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins because of Your just punishments; but most of all because they offend You, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Your grace to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Amen.

PRAYER OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

MY JESUS, I believe that You are truly present in the Holy Sacrament of the altar. I love You above all things and I passionately desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come spiritually into my soul, so that I may unite myself wholly to You now, and forever. Amen.