

# Encouragement

March 2017 – Issue 68

## 'LIVING IN THE LIGHT'

So often, when we approach Lent we are filled with thoughts such as ‘what do I give up?’, ‘what a sad, trying time’, ‘Oh no... extra prayer’, penance, confession, self-denial etc. but how regrettable this path is, if we just stay there. Yes, we should reflect and pray about our lives – our regrets, our hopes. Yes, perhaps we should try to bring our spiritual lives into some shape, remembering that we are called to holiness. But should we stop there? It is possible to change our lives and our hearts (metanoia – change of heart) so that we become positive Christians, light bearers for other, dynamic life-giving people who share the light of God’s Love with all.

If we merely stay in the ‘don’ts’ of our lives we become guarded and defeated people, unable to experience the amazing grace that is offered to us.

As we move into Lent, could we reflect on what it really means to be a person of prayer and service. We are called to be a beacon of light. The following **HOMILY** reflects this attitude of ‘call’ to be alight and reminds us not to be flavourless and darkened. Too often Christians are seen as prohibitors rather than liberators, churchgoers only and not servants in a broken world. So let us ponder these thoughts as we read the following.....

HH

“The word of God (that we have just listened to) is powerful. It is challenging us to be His light to a darkened world.

The Prophet Isaiah tells us what true religion is: it isn’t something that’s airy fairy, it’s about mixing with people and making contact with them. Real religion, the type of religion the Prophets and Jesus talk about, is practical religion. A truly religious person is someone who shares his bread with the poor, gives shelter to the homeless and clothes the naked. If we are not involved with the sick and needy then we have to ask ourselves what kind of religion we are subscribing to, sitting in a comfortable home and praying to God, while at the same time we are taking no notice of the poor and the needy is not what

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true religion is all about. God hears the prayers of those who are at the cutting edge of life, working for and among the lowly and broken ones of this world.

**L** In ‘today’s’ gospel, Matthew puts before us two images of the Christian whose vocation is to change the world. “You are the salt of the earth” he tells us. We all know what salt does, it seasons and preserves whatever it comes into contact with. And our lives as Christians must do the same. If we, as Christians, are having no effect on the people around us then we are as useless as salt that has lost its taste. If we are not trying to live Gospel lives then we are failing the world, which needs our example.

**G** The second image of a Christian that Jesus gives us ‘today’ is the image of light, “You are the light of the world” He tells us, and light lights up the darkness, and we have been called to light up the darkness of our world by living the Christian life as Jesus outlined for us when He gave us the eight Beatitudes.

**L** So if we are living pure, holy and blameless, meaningful, forgiving and loving lives then we are being beacons of hope to a world that is plunged into the darkness of selfishness and self pre-occupation.

**N** The English writer John Ruskin gives us a lovely picture of what the Lord wants us to be in our world. **T** In the days before we had electricity the streets were lit at night by gas lamps. The lamplighter had to go from lamp to lamp lighting them with a burning torch. One day Ruskin was sitting in his house looking out of a front window. Across the valley was

**W** a street on a hillside. There Ruskin could see the torch of the lamplighter lighting the lamps as he went. Because of the darkness he could not see the lamplighter, only the torch and the trail of the lights it left behind him. After a short while Ruskin turned to the person next to him and said “There’s a good illustration of a Christian. People may never have known him, they may never have met him, they may never have seen him, but they know he passed through their world by the trail of light he left behind.”



Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could so live our lives that through us the light of Christ could shine out on our family and then out of the family into the street, into the neighbourhood and then out into the world.

You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world, think of that today and let's ask ourselves what it means for each one of us:

A little story to end with....

Once upon a time there was a great biblical scholar who was also noted for his great piety. He spent hours every day in the study of the scriptures and in prayer and in meditation. One day a holy man visited the town in which the scholar lived. On hearing this the scholar set about looking for him. He looked first in the church but didn't find him there, then he looked in a local shrine but he wasn't there either. He looked in all the other likely places but failed to find him. Eventually he found him in the market place. On meeting him, he told him, who he was and how he spent hours every day in study and meditation. Then he said "I have come to seek your advice on how I might grow in the service of God." The advice he got was simple and direct. Looking at him intently the holy man said "It's easy to be a saint in your room, you should go out into the market place and try to be a saint there."

We are not told whether or not the scholar had the courage to act on that advice. It's the kind of advice Jesus Himself would have given. In fact it's exactly the advice He is giving to us in the gospel when He says "You are the light of the world, no-one lights a lamp to put it under the bed, they put it on a lamp stand where it shines for everyone to see. In the same way *your* light must shine in the sight of people so that seeing your good works they may give praise to your Father in heaven."

It is very easy to let the light shine in the comfort and safety of your own room. But that can be a selfish thing because it means we are keeping the light for ourselves. It's not easy to let the light shine on the rough and tumble of the market place, but that is where it is most needed. Our faith isn't for keeping, it's for giving away and that is something most of us shrink away from and leave to others. But Jesus leaves us in no doubt today that lighting up our darkened world is rôle of every Christian including you and me.



As we ponder the Cross of Jesus and the life He lived and called us to we could ask ourselves how we can become more filled with light this Lent. Could we ask and pray that the Holy Spirit enlightens us? Could we offer to volunteer for some service either in the church or in the community? All charities need volunteers. Could we shed our regrets and move forward into light and a blessed life. Jesus suffered and died for us to enable us to gain freedom. No change is easy – no service without cost, but it also brings joy. Let us make Lent a time of joyful expectation.

Halina Holman



#### Pope Francis.....

Dear friends, Lent is the favourable season for renewing our encounter with Christ, living in his word, in the sacraments and in our neighbour. The Lord, who overcame the deceptions of the Tempter during the forty days in the desert, shows us the path we must take. May the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion, so that we can rediscover the gift of God's word, be purified of the sin that blinds us, and serve Christ present in our brothers and sisters in need. I encourage all the faithful to express this spiritual renewal also by sharing in the Lenten Campaigns promoted by many Church organizations in different parts of the world, and thus to favour the culture of encounter in our one human family. Let us pray for one another so that, by sharing in the victory of Christ, we may open our doors to the weak and poor. Then we will be able to experience and share to the full the joy of Easter.

Vatican, 2016

#### Prayer

Father Almighty, You revealed to us that You are light. Help us to live our lives in Your radiance and we will be in fellowship with one another through Jesus, the Christ, Our Lord.

#### Feasts in March (Sundays in Lent, 1-4)

**1<sup>st</sup> Ash Wednesday (Fasting and abstinence)**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Women's World Day of Prayer**

**7<sup>th</sup> Ss. Perpetua and Felicity**

**8<sup>th</sup> St. John of God, 9<sup>th</sup> St. Frances of Rome,**

**17<sup>th</sup> St. Patrick of Ireland**

**20<sup>th</sup> Saint Joseph (Spouse of Our Lady)**

**25<sup>th</sup> The Annunciation**

**26<sup>th</sup> Mothering Sunday**

**28<sup>th</sup> St. David of Wales**