

# Encouragement

## ENCOURAGEMENT

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*Lent a time to 'be clean'*

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We put our dirty linen in a washing machine. A dishwasher, machine or person, cleans the pots and pans. We speak of 'spring cleaning' – getting the house ship-shape. We pay people to sort out our garden and valet our cars, but do we think of doing that to our souls, which are infinitely of more value than our temporal possessions.

Lent is a season when we could really think of just such a job, a real attempt to clean out the rubbish, polish up that which has become a little tarnished and wash out that which has become truly dirty and not fit to be worn.

Our souls are the temple of the Holy Spirit and should house such a guest in the best conditions possible. Not only are we the carriers of the Holy Spirit of God but we receive Jesus Himself and welcome Him so that He can direct us in His Way.

The question that we can put to ourselves is how can we do this? Sadly, most of us dodge the issue and like to see ourselves as pretty clean, good living people. True enough, we all have good traits, desires, and are willing to help others. However, are we really that good? Most of us would also, if honest, admit that we are far from perfect – and have faults and failings – at least, one would hope so..? But it is much more painful to want and desire to change. It is this deeper and more profound desire that is required to root out all that which could lead us into sin, and distance ourselves from God, who so wants us to be at one with Him. This 'at-one-ment' is a healthy desire not to do anything that would injure our neighbour, ourselves and the Most Holy Trinity. Easy to do? No, not at all, for our fallen nature and inclinations often justify our actions without considering the effects on others.

In our ignorance we continue to act as if all is well in our house. After all we do not kill, commit adultery, steal, deliberately falsify – we look after our parents, try to keep Sunday Holy, do not swear etc. etc. etc. Those of us brave enough to admit that we do

lose track of these falls, sometimes find them hard to root them out. We find it hard to root out those things that can make us self-content and satisfied with our state of soul. We justify the failings by our good acts and so we do not have a really good look at ourselves and how God sees us.

I often think of what I would feel if Jesus stood before me and looked deeply at me – as He did to Peter, the Samaritan woman at the well, Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, Matthew, and the rich young man. Would I avert my gaze – could I look Him in the eye with love and say "Master, forgive me, I will try to do better", and cause a profound change in my heart – Metanoia, a real change of being.



Jesus has something to say about cleanliness: to the Apostles He says that they do not need a bath because they are clean in the physical sense, but they need their feet washed by One who serves, and that they too must learn to serve. But He also teaches them earlier in His teachings about what is clean and unclean. The Jews of the time were burdened with so many rules and regulations about cleanliness; washing feet, their arms to the elbow, remembering that lepers were seen as unclean and considered sinners. If you remember the pots at Cana at 'The Marriage Feast' were for ritual washing.

Jesus turns all this around with a very special statement:

**"Listen to Me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean. If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to this."** Mk 7: 14-23

It is this last statement that we should ponder greatly during Lent this year. If we have a pure heart then we will be less inclined to speak ill of people, to cheat, lie, avoid our responsibilities. If we have a pure heart then we will listen to that small voice within us which tells us not to go down a certain road or do a

**'A good person is soft and flexible to each good and separates evil from himself or herself.' St. Hildegard of Bingen**

certain thing. Most often we realise that what we are about to do may not be the right thing but we do it anyway often with the thought that God will forgive us and that it is not that bad really. Truly He will, but we do have to repent and make restitution, putting things right if we can. Purity of heart is a central call of any Christian. A pure heart, Jesus tells us in the Beatitudes, will enable us to see God. How true is this statement! When we see things through the eyes **not** of envy resentment or jealousy, anger, distrust or malice, we see both simply and purely forgiving even as we proceed. This surely will enable us to see a reflection of God in the other person and within ourselves, His presence.

Every day of our lives we make choices for good or ill. Sometimes they are so small that we do not even consider that they might be, or indeed are sins. It is more likely that we see these failures in others long before we see them in ourselves. It is interesting that the things that we accuse others of are often the very thing that we are guilty of doing. It is rather like the man or woman who tells someone to stop shouting and swearing and pointing a finger in such a loud and demonstrative way that everyone can hear.... Our faults and failing are often hidden to us.

Sometimes we are only caught out by an incident which draws our attention. We can state categorically that we would never do such a thing.... But what a dangerous thing that is to say for given another set off circumstances and off we go headlong into that very thing. St. Peter discovered that and so have I.

Lent is a time for that very change of heart that is required. If we stop trying to justify our actions all the time and look into our own lives and heart we will truly find areas where improvement is necessary and can be achieved. Owning who we are before God is perhaps the first step. We are loved and have been rescued from the trap of sin but we must first acknowledge that we are all sinners and far from perfect. The Saints realise this and pick themselves up many many times after a fall from grace or error. They learn to be realistic about themselves and know their weaknesses. Jesus' retort to those who thought that they were 'observant' was to list what makes them unclean. It is not a pretty list and so easy to say, 'not me, Lord not me, I would never do that'... Yet

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within our heart we harbour many of these **intentions**... these too make us unclean.

Perhaps in this Lent we could examine our conscience carefully and admit to those things that we would not like anyone to know about us. Hard but rewarding for we can, in prayer, ask the Lord's help and we will be overcomers and reap the blessings that He wishes to give us.

The *Special Pastor* says the following...

'Today many of us find it very difficult to admit to our spiritual poverty, our weaknesses and our sins, and that is why so many of us have stopped going to confession, and so we are unable to receive "the gift of God" which Jesus wishes to give us and when we do that we are the losers!'+

WE are called to be winners... Let us try this Lent bit by bit to be so. Halina Holman

### **Pope Francis**

"Be careful against the coldness of our own hearts. Selfishness and spiritual sloth, sterile pessimism, the temptation to self-absorption, constant warring among ourselves, and the worldly mentality that makes us concerned only for appearances. A cold heart has no room for charity, it leads to violence against anyone we think is a threat to our own 'certainties': the unborn child, the elderly and infirm, the migrant, the alien among us, or our neighbour who does not live up to our expectations. To combat these evils, I recommend three penitential practices: prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. By devoting more time to *prayer*, we enable our hearts to root out our secret lies and forms of self-deception, and then to find the consolation God offers."

Lent 2018



### **Feasts in March**

1<sup>st</sup> St. David

3<sup>rd</sup> **Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

4<sup>th</sup> St. Casimir

6<sup>th</sup> **Ash Wednesday ..Fast and Abstinence**

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

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

10<sup>th</sup> **First Sunday of Lent**

15<sup>th</sup> St. Louise

17<sup>th</sup> **Second Sunday of Lent**

**St. Patrick**

18<sup>th</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Bishop

19<sup>th</sup> **St. Joseph**

24<sup>th</sup> **Third Sunday of Lent**

25<sup>th</sup> **The Annunciation of the Lord**

31<sup>st</sup> **Fourth Sunday of Lent**

**Mothers' Day**