

Weekly Message from Fr William for the First Sunday of Lent 2023

Dear People of St Mary's

We have begun a new season in the church's year. This holy season of Lent began last week with 'Ash Wednesday'. We were joined for the 9am Mass by Year 5 and Year 6 from our school, to mark the beginning of this new season. I spoke about what the season of Lent means for us. The first reading for Ash Wednesday begins with these words of the Spirit speaking through the Prophet Joel: 'Now now, it is the Lord who speaks, turn back to me with all your heart.' That is our Christian calling during the season of Lent, to come back to God with all our heart. And the little acts of renunciation we might take up during this season, or any extra acts of love we might try to practise, may help us in this endeavour – to come back to him with all our heart.

In the Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday Christ teaches us the three ways that are now commended to us during Lent – Almsgiving, Prayer, and Fasting.

Almsgiving is a regular dimension of our Christian lives. Throughout the year we give to charitable causes, either through our second collections, or through the charitable giving to particular causes that individuals may feel inspired to support. Lent is a time when we might decide to be particularly intentional in charitable giving, in response to Christ's call on Ash Wednesday. Lent is also a time when the church as a whole puts before us extra opportunities to give, like the CAFOD appeal this Sunday.

Prayer is another regular dimension of our Christian lives. Christ encourages us on Ash Wednesday to 'go to your private room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place.' If we've been a bit remiss or half-hearted about regularly turning to our Father in prayer in recent times, now is the time to be extra conscientious and make time in our busy lives, every day, to spend time with him in prayer.

And fasting. Not personally my favourite thing, but something Christ calls us to, at least in this season of Lent. It could mean cutting down on food. It could mean cutting out on snacking, or alcohol. It could mean eating more simply in some way, such as giving up meat or added sugar. Or it could mean giving up some little pleasure during Lent that we know we don't really need. It will be different for everyone. The important thing is the reason we do it. We do it, I would suggest, to become more free, free from our dependence on trifling and passing pleasures, free instead to live by our deepest desire, which is for God's love, in fact for God himself who comes to us now in his words and in his sacraments.



First Sunday of Lent 26th February 2023