



DECLAN BISHOP OF CLIFTON

Pastoral Letter for the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

This coming Wednesday, with the blessing and distribution of ashes, we enter the season of Lent. As St Paul says this is a favourable time – a time of renewal as we look towards Easter and the Resurrection.

It is important to remember that we enter Lent together not as individuals on a private journey to the Kingdom of God. Through the Prophet Joel, God calls us together, summons the community, inviting us to come back to God with all our hearts because the God in whom we believe is all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness and ready to relent.

This year as a Diocese we are reflecting and praying about what it means to be 'In Communion' with God, one another and the whole of creation. We are called to be in solidarity with the whole of humanity. We are also called to recognise our connectedness with the whole of creation. All creation is the work of God and the world in all its beauty and cruelty is entrusted to us as a gift not to be exploited for human greed. Lent is a time to reconcile ourselves to one another and to examine the way we care for the rest of creation. We do not always live as if we are brothers and sisters and there can also be an indifference and exploitation of the environment. In the letter to the Romans, St Paul says that the whole of creation is waiting to be freed from its slavery to corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God.

This 'favourable time' of forty days of Lent is an opportunity for us to renew our relationships in the light of the Gospel of Christ. To do this we need to hear the 'cry of the poor' and the 'cry of creation'. Any Lenten observance we undertake should be to strengthen the communion we have with God, one another and the whole of creation.

Prayer, fasting and alms giving are tried ways of Lenten renewal. In prayer we come to know God more intimately. We come to understand our personal vocation more clearly and are given the strength to live that vocation in our everyday lives. During this year as the Church in England and Wales celebrates the Year of the Word; The God Who Speaks, we could pray the readings of the Sundays of Lent during the week which precedes that particular Sunday. We can do this alone or in groups and share with one another what we have discovered from our reflections.

Prayer opens new horizons. So too should fasting. Through our self denial we can grow in awareness of the needs of others especially the hungry of the world who often go hungry because they are victims of war and violence and they have seen their homes and livelihoods destroyed. There are many hungry people in refugee camps throughout the world who live with little hope. Their hunger may not just be for food but for justice, peace, love and friendship. In them we can hear the cry of the poor and recognise our duty to help them through such agencies as Cafod and Pax Christi.

As a society we waste an enormous amount of food every day, every year. During Lent we could be more watchful of the food we waste and be more thankful for the food we have while others starve.

Alms giving is the call to have a generous heart; to be willing to share what we have with others. I visited St Gregory's Catholic College in Bath last week whilst they were celebrating their 40th anniversary. Part of that celebration is for students and staff to carry out 40 acts of kindness towards others. During these forty days of Lent, we could aim to do an act of kindness each day so that at Easter we can celebrate a newness of life for ourselves and others.

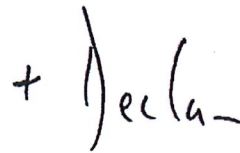
Today we hear the call of God to be holy. Holiness is frequently thought to be for other people who can withdraw themselves from the ordinary affairs of life and spend time in prayer. That is a false understanding of holiness. We are all called to be holy by living our lives in love and bearing witness to Christ in everything we do wherever we find ourselves.

Pope Francis tells us not to be afraid of holiness. It will not take away any of our energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary we will become what God had in mind for us when he created us, and we will be faithful to our deepest self. To depend on God will free us from every form of enslavement and lead us to recognise our great dignity. The journey of Lent, like that of the Israelites who were led by Moses from Egypt through the desert to the promised land, will be a journey from whatever enslaves us today to the freedom of the people of God.

Lent is an opportunity for us to repent and believe the Gospel. It is a season to deepen our commitment to be missionary disciples, knowing that through his Cross and Resurrection, Jesus has reconciled us to the Father and made all things new.

May God bless you, be with you and strengthen the communion that we are called to be.

With my best wishes and prayers

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Declan". The plus sign is on the left, followed by the name "Declan" written in a cursive style.

Rt Rev Declan Lang

Bishop of Clifton

To be read and made available in all
Churches and Chapels in the Clifton Diocese
on the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary time, 22/23 February 2020.

This pastoral letter is also available from our website

cliftondiocese.com