

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (B)
26TH FEBRUARY 2012

Good morning everyone, and what a special season in our Church's year we are starting.

And what a promise we were given with our entrance antiphon – some of us may not have registered it – When he calls to me, I will answer him and give him honour. (Psalm 91.15)

Isn't it encouraging as we enter this period of Lent, that many of us will be either giving something up, or trying to do something positive. God will help us if we ask him.

During Lent we renew the covenant God made with us at our baptism. Noah and his family were saved through the flood that cleaned the Earth and in a similar way we are saved through the water of baptism, as Peter reminds us in his letter. In the days of Noah putting a bow down was a sign of peace – and we have the beautiful reminder of God's promise of love and peace every time we see a rainbow in the sky. When you next see a rainbow, think of God, let your mind and heart be drawn to him.

In today's Gospel we hear how Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. We too have times in the wilderness; we live in a world with trials and problems that will test our faith. But we just heard, "When he calls to me, I will answer him". God loves us so very much; he is with us when we are struggling.

Well, the loud and clear message Jesus gives at the end of today's Gospel is "Repent and believe the good news".

And it really is Good News. God loves us so much, that by Jesus dying then rising from death, we are reconciled with him. In effect Jesus has unlocked the door to heaven for us. Don't let anything stop us from opening it. Sin, or holding onto something wrong can keep that door closed.

And so Jesus tells us to repent. When we respond to love it is a natural response to look at ourselves and turn our lives more completely over to Christ and his way of life. This involves giving up sin in some form. The goal is not just to abstain from sin for the duration of Lent but to develop habits that help us root sin out of our lives forever.

I am perfectly able to say sorry in a manner that really means nothing, and I am sure we all can think of times we or others say "So...rry". Hmm. Sarita correctly pointed out to our household that sorry – when it's really meant – also means that I will try not to repeat what I have done, I intend to do better.

As the bishop suggested in his letter last Sunday and Father Stephen on Wednesday, we should all spend some time reflecting on our days.

Without doubt, one of the biggest problems many of us have is we are not always aware when we have sinned or done something wrong. If, when we go to bed, we just think through our day, most of us come across moments when we may have upset or hurt someone, even if it is very slight. It could just be a cross word or cross expression. It need only take 2 minutes to think – Jesus loves me, did I make him happy today? PAUSE

We can each decide how to respond to that question.

In the film Love Story with Ryan O’Neil and Ali MacGraw there’s a line “Love means never having to say you are sorry”. Rubbish, I’m with Lisa from the Simpsons who quipped “No it doesn’t mean that”. The Rugrats were correct with “Being bad means never having to say sorry”.

Saying sorry is not easy, yet making up makes everyone feel better. Jesus says “Repent”. How important did Jesus think this was? When he said “If you are offering your gift at the altar and remember your brother has something against you, first go and be reconciled with your brother”. That could be a 3-4 day round trip on foot!

The church offers us reconciliation and we miss out if we don’t go. It is a sacrament, so God is at work and when we call on him, he will answer. Expect his presence and you won’t be disappointed.

We can let Lent slip by (and many Christians do miss out). Or (shout) we can grab it.

To help us we are recommended the 3 disciplines of prayer, fasting, almsgiving/charity.

Prayer: If we give more time to prayer during Lent we will draw closer to our Lord. It is easy to combine a reflection about the day with simple short prayer before going to sleep. Or if, like me, you feel exhausted at bed time, do this just before or after your evening meal.

Fasting is much more than a means of developing self-control. It actually increases our personal freedom as we find we are in control, we are not puppets controlled by advertising or consumerism.

Most of us should be able to reduce how much we eat, perhaps focusing on Fridays. Some may also try to go one day on just bread and water. Fasting should be linked to our concern for those who are forced to fast by their poverty, those who suffer from the injustices of our economic and political structures, those who are in need for any reason. 1 child dies every 20 seconds from using contaminated water, that’s roughly 30 children since we started Mass. Over 20,000 people every day, that’s a third of the population of Weymouth, die each day....simply from not having enough to eat. By our Baptism, we are charged with the responsibility of showing Christ's love to the world, especially to those in need. Fasting can help us realize the suffering that so many people in our world experience every day, and it should lead us to greater efforts to alleviate that suffering.

One simple way we can do this is to write down how much money we save because of our fasting, and then giving this away, be it to a charity or someone in need. I know these are hard times financially, but consider that through Mary's meals it costs £6 to feed a child for a year. That's 2 pints of beer, just 1 packet of cigarettes, or a takeaway meal. That's literally food for thought.

Fasting is also an aid to prayer, so if we feel hungry let's try to let that feeling make us think of God. The first reading on the Friday after Ash Wednesday points out another important dimension of fasting. Isaiah insists that fasting without changing our behavior is not pleasing to God. This comes back to the idea of rooting out sin for good, not just Lent. Develop a good habit.

But we do not only have to think of food. What about fasting from a television show – that would give the double benefit of creating some time to reflect or pray!

Or how about fasting from criticism - both of ourselves and others? Imagine how that might increase our prayer life assuming that every time we recognize we are about to be critical we say a prayer instead. This could be a good challenge at home, but even here. Many parents will remember being criticized in church if someone thinks their children are too noisy. Let's be careful exactly how we speak.

To recapitulate: When we call to God he will answer us – let's ask for help. Try to reflect for a short time each day. Fast from something, TV, food, criticism. Give something to someone in need. Say sorry, come to reconciliation and open that door.

We are all busy people, and our commitments, anxieties, pressures we are under can cause us to fall into routine way of living. We forget what an outstanding adventure Jesus offers us. The ashes we received on Wednesday remind us that our time on Earth is temporary. Eternity is a thought that can blow your mind; it can unsettle the sanest of people when considered without the security of knowing where you will be for it.

Will we put our trust in things that will inevitably crumble away, just as we shall return to dust? Or will we use this time of Lent to grow more into the wonderful person God made us to be and accept the certainty of God's gift, by doing as Jesus said "Repent and believe in the Gospel".

Rev Jonathan de Kretser

BIDDING PRAYERS

Father, we thank you for this season of Lent and the opportunity to grow closer to you, and we pray in confidence through the Holy Spirit.

For the church, that those in authority demonstrate through their lives the love of our Lord in action, and that this example guides us and helps us to draw closer to you.

That those you are calling to the priesthood, diaconate or religious life will respond to the love that beckons them. Help them to have the courage to say “yes” to you.

That our country’s leaders face their responsibilities’ with integrity; that they recognise everyone’s right to be respected regardless of whether they are rich or poor, and honour your design for the world by protecting the true meaning of marriage.

For those in the world suffering the result of greed of any kind. Children dying of malnutrition whilst others have plenty, and families in pain following the deaths of their loved ones in wars such as Syria, where so many no longer seem to know what is right.

For our community that we deepen our love for you and each other this Lent, and for Kelly and Jenny that your Spirit will continue to bless them on their special journey this Easter.

We pray for a few moments in silence for our own intentions.

Let us join together in asking Mary to intercede for us as we say, “Hail Mary...”

God ever merciful and faithful, You are always kindly disposed towards us. May our prayers open our minds and hearts to act according to your will. We make our prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.