

First Sunday of Lent

Dear Parishioners,

Those of you who visited our parish website over the past month in the hope of finding the weekly reflection from the parish priest, to which you may have become accustomed, will have been disappointed. The temporary intermission was involuntary and motivated by a general admonition from my GP and from many within the parish community to “*take things easy.*” The season of Lent, which opened on Ash Wednesday, is a period of the Church’s year in which we consciously devote more time and attention to God. We consider our relationship with him, reflecting frequently on how life’s experiences and our own growing understanding of human relations, especially when we are raising a family or, in my case, taking care of a community, evolve and affect the way we see God.

On Ash Wednesday we are all dramatically confronted with our mortality: *remember sister/brother that you are dust, and unto dust you will return.* We know that one day we will meet our God face to face. Jesus, in the latter part of his public ministry, frequently raised the issue of the *end times* and of the *judgement*, and of the separation of the virtuous from the wicked, of the good from the evil. And the prospect of that encounter is daunting. It causes many of us to be anxious, not least because in the early days of Lent we hear so much about sin and the need for repentance. There is also the requirement, articulated by the OT prophets Joel, Jonah, Jeremiah and Isaiah, to do penance. There is an urgency about their message such as to make us anxious. And yet the Church, borrowing words Paul the Apostle wrote to the early Christians of Corinth (whose lifestyle was anything but exemplary), insists that this is *a time of grace, a favourable time!* Early in his pontificate Pope Francis declared a Holy Year of Mercy and in his messages to us insisted that not only was God merciful, but that we too must be merciful to one another.

Taking a leaf out of the Holy Father’s book and taking the advice of my GP and my parishioners seriously, I have decided to *take things easy* in my relationship with God. Most sons who feel loved and esteemed by their father chill out when they are at home and are at ease, off-hand even, with their father. If we really consider Lent a time of grace, a special moment set aside for us to *chill out* with God, to listen patiently to his word, to feel we can talk to him and give ourselves more time in which to actually do so, then we will be taking Lent easily. And yet our Lent experience will be no less intense. It may well be more fruitful than in Lents gone by when we beat ourselves with the penitential stick. I have to say I learned a lot from the four weeks of imposed leisure and taking things at a gentler pace. I was able to devote more time to the preparation of *Forty Days & Forty Nights.* I hope it will provide many of you with companionship during the Lenten season.

Father Patrick