

A Short Reflection for Lent.

As we begin this holy season of Lent sometimes it can feel a little like a boot camp !Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving - all of which require some sort of sacrifice and often a great deal of effort.This week since Ash Wednesday we hopefully have taken up these practices because we want to please God (and perhaps lose a few pounds too)

Lent is a time of repentance, conversion,prayer, fasting, almsgiving and self denial. Not only this but it is also a time of renewal, retreat, refreshment and revival when we rediscover anew and afresh not only ourselves but the compassion and kindness of God, who so loved the world that sent his only Son. The word 'Lent' comes from the old English word 'lencten' meaning 'springtime' In her cookery and housekeeping classic on household management, Mrs Beeton wrote " Springtime is the usual period for house cleansing and removing the dust and dirt which accumulates during winter months."

The season of Lent can for us be understood in that same light. It is a time, by God's grace, to remove the dust and dirt of sin which may have accumulated through the ordinary nitty-gritty grind of daily life. Any man or women who is good at housework will tell you, a good spring clean requires planning, perseverance and frankly speaking hard work ! Then no less is required in our approach to this Lenten season.

We perhaps can take heart from the wisdom of St. John Chrysostom who speaks to us across the centuries: " When the fast makes its appearance, like a kind of spiritual springtime, let us as soldiers burnish our weapons and as harvesters sharpen our sickles and as sailors order our thoughts against the waves of extravagant desires, and as travellers set out on the journey towards heaven, and as wrestlers strip for the contest. For the believer is at once a harvester, a sailor, a soldier, a wrestler and a traveller. " On Ash Wednesday the ashes were put onto our foreheads, in public, as a sign of our commitment to enter the desert of Lent in order that we may enjoy the fruit, banquet and blessings of the Easter dawn. On Ash Wednesday we bowed our heads to receive the blessings of God, who invites us to enter into the mystery of the cross, the perfect revelation of his mercy and love.

Like any boot camp, Lent can seem a long and hard, if we make it meaningful. Even those tiny sacrifices can wear us down over time. But whatever or however we choose to spend our Lent, let it be meaningful, then we can be assured that God will graciously "repay " us with his presence, with his love, and with his grace. Let's pray that the Lord will help us to experience more of his blessings this Lent.

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