

Lent will be soon be upon us and Ash Wednesday this year is March 5th . This is a good time to consider what we are being called to do especially as this is a jubilee year.

PREPARING FOR LENT

Lent is such a blessed time of the year and there are so many graces available that it is worth preparing a plan for the season so that we reach the Paschal Mysteries with our hearts and minds made clean. Here are a few suggestions:

- 1) This might not be your first thought but SILENCE. Reduce the time spend on social media, internet etc and cultivate a listening heart. Without silence the work God will be able to do in your heart will be limited.
- 2) YES TO TRUST – NO TO WORRY. Try and plan this carefully as trust is so important; it is foundational. But we all tend to suffer from anxiety and fear etc but we need to put it aside. Again I recommend the Surrender Novena and a small book by Jacques Philippe “The Way of Trust and Love.”
- 3) FASTING. Yes officially the only days of fasting in the whole year are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. But fasting is so important – it purifies the soul and together with prayer and alms giving it is so powerful before God. It doesn't have to be severe at all. Fasting from media etc as above is a really productive fast. Try simply not to eat between meals at least on some days of the week.
- 4) PRAYER – We have been talking a lot about prayer since it is the year of prayer and so use Lent wisely to pray a bit more deeply if we can't manage more time. Pray from the heart – quality is much more important than quantity.
- 5) Some SPIRITUAL READING. Learn more about the faith.
- 6) MAKE A GOOD CONFESSION REGULARLY



Dear Parishioners

Just a few miscellaneous points this weekend.

1) Firstly and most importantly, let us remind ourselves that the Jubilee Year brings with it special graces not available at other times. The Immaculate Conception and St Norbert's at Spalding is our Jubilee Church which means that visiting the church brings with it a plenary indulgence. Fr Jim is keeping the church open for visitors – go to the website for details - <https://test.stnorberts.org.uk/news-letter/> A Jubilee is a time for repentance and turning back more wholeheartedly to the Lord.

It is interesting that in Hebrew there is no word for a person who has repented only for one who is ongoing in their repentance.

Remember we have a Lenten Station mass with the Bishop in Spalding on 1st April 7.00pm with confessions before.

2) the Bishop's Enabling Our Mission Appeal. We are now entering the phase where I shall meet with parishioners both individually and as small groups to appeal to you to support this appeal. We have a double incentive because the Diocese is generously supporting our parish in our plans to use our facilities to become both a parish center and a mission hub. We are looking to help the local community in three particular areas: Families in need, the elderly in the community and a center for help. This will require looking to the local community for financial support in our endeavour. The Diocese is helping us with administration, fundraising and advice which will enable me also to concentrate on spiritual matters.



Finances and money matters are always difficult and sensitive areas to address especially given our weak human nature. But the true and in my opinion only real way to discuss it is in a spiritual context.

The fifth precept of the Church is that we are obligated to provide for the needs of the Church so that would include help as well as financial contribution. The precepts are there to guide us on the way to heaven. We could say that they establish the healthy minimum necessary for salvation: e.g. to attend mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

So for spiritual reasons we are bound to support the Church. The spiritual benefits are great for those who give. In the Old Testament – and supported by Jesus – there was a system of tithing and first fruits. This was to give back to God the creator and provider of all the first returns on harvests, cattle etc. The Old Testament had hard words for those who did not contribute – after all not to tithe was to try to cheat God. See Malachi 3:8. The Old Testament tithe was to give tenths (10%) back to the Church. This was an act of faith in God because it also meant to give him the best of the crops and animals, thereby trusting in him to provide.

This is the first and most central point to contributions – it is a return to God and it is an act of faith in God to provide. People ask do we still have to contribute 10%? Everyone has to pray about this and discern but St Thomas Aquinas teaches that if they tithed under the Old Covenant, how much more should one under the New.

Tithing (I will keep this word even if it does not have to mean 10% - because it keeps us focused on the root reason for contributing) is also connected with living a simple life. Many people contribute very little to the Church whilst having a fairly high standard of living. Also, it can often be the less well off who contribute more. Pope St John Paul II said that no one was too poor that they could not contribute and no one was too rich that they could not receive. Think about the Widow's Mite in Luke 21: 1-4. She put in not from her excess but from all she had.

I have always been of the firm belief that the Lord will provide and work will get done even if people give little – but those that give little will not have a reward. Often people seem outraged when tithing is discussed even though families still practice it within the Church and especially amongst our fellow Christian brethren. But to me it seems completely reasonable.

People will ask – do I have to tithe 10%? The answer is impossible to give. There is no legal requirement to tithe but only to contribute. Each person has to pray and discern what they are being called to contribute.

However, it is most useful to discern and to come up with a percentage and to stick with it – pray and discern, set a figure, act.

However, I would also like to add that one can include in one's tithe – quite justifiably – other donations one makes outside of parish contributions; for example, giving to charities is part of a tithe, going on retreat, buying necessary Catholic books, homeless people, second collections. Nor should you feel that you have to support a multitude of charities.

A few last thoughts. This is your hard earned money and many are living in difficult circumstances and perhaps having to support extended family members. So always pray and always listen. Err on the side of trusting God and his providence without being imprudent.

One good way of thinking about it – a ball park figure – is to set a minimum of contributing at least one hour's wage per week

Remember to support the Church is to support mission (that is why we are moving to be a more missionary church under Bishop Patrick's direction.) To support mission is to help save souls.

Many thanks to all who give generously and support our parish – it is nearly always the case that a small percentage give the largest contribution.

But I would also like to add a few facts:

- Many more people could gift aid and also set up standing orders.
- Our offertory collections (basket loose cash) are extremely low and well below what our parish should be giving given our numbers.
- This financial year will probably end up in deficit. We have a good reserve fund of over £200, 000 but that will go very quickly on remedial work needed and redecoration of the Church etc.
- I as your parish priest receive a salary but I too have a moral obligation to tithe upon this amount. So an appeal for more money will not result in my receiving any more money.
- IT IS NOT PRIMARILY AN ECONOMIC ISSUE BUT A SPIRITUAL ONE.

