



Little did we think, this time last year, that Covid – which was just beginning to enter our collective consciousness as a serious threat – would still be with us today and would have had such devastating effects worldwide. Although light now seems to be at the end of the tunnel in the form of vaccines, we have been living through and adapting to a constant change of tightening and loosening restrictions in order to keep ourselves, and everyone else, safe. Now we find ourselves in a third lockdown and coping with an even more contagious strain of the virus and the need for us to reach out our hands and our hearts, in care and in prayer, is as great as ever.

As a result of the Coronavirus' effect on our celebrations of Mass it can be very difficult for us to exercise that 'fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations' desired by the Second Vatican Council. Deacon Stephen Corrigan, one of our students for the priesthood who was ordained a deacon last year, gives us a thoughtful reflection on 'Active participation at a time of Covid' offering ideas on how we might do just that.

We are about to embark on our Lenten journey, which begins on Ash Wednesday (17 February this year) but, because of Coronavirus, it will be very different from our usual experience. Many, perhaps even the majority, will not be able to get to church and, for those who do, the reception of ashes itself will be different. This year the priest will bless the ashes in silence, then address those present by reciting once the formula found in the Roman Missal: 'Repent, and believe in the Gospel or 'Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return'. He will then then cleanse his hands, put on a face mask and will sprinkle the ashes on the head of each person who comes to him without saying anything.

Within this newsletter we include articles on Lent itself, Ashes, the Year B readings, Lent in the family, and the joy of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Whilst physically going to confession might be impossible this year we remember the words of Pope Francis who reminded us that, in such cases, we can make our confession directly to God, accompanying it with a perfect Act of Contrition and a resolve to go to sacramental Confession as soon as possible.

For more Lent and Easter resources, see the tab 'Feasts, Saints and Seasons' above.

Finally, we also include some links for Stations of the Cross for children, young people and families, along with a link to our latest resource 'Celebrating the Mass' – a resource for teachers, chaplains and all those involved in the preparation of school Masses.

## “Active Participation at a time of Covid”

By Deacon Stephen Corrigan



When I was discussing ideas for a seminary dissertation topic, I realised that I wanted to understand properly why the liturgical reforms had occurred after the Second Vatican Council. It was explained to me that the obvious thing to study was Vatican II's desire for “fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14), and the subsequent developments in understanding and practice. What did the Council mean by this? To sum up many church documents and scholarly debates in a short article is a challenge, but here goes:

The Council wanted the laity to realise their own baptismal right: to participate actively in the liturgy. This was not an innovation, but the development of an idea found throughout the Church's history. It did not mean giving the entire congregation a job, as helpful as gestures, acclamations and singing are. Achieving this involves a greater awareness of what happens when we gather for worship, especially at Mass. It is not possible if approached superficially, but requires a mindset which is open to conversion; to living out one's Baptism, and sharing one's faith with others. I quickly realised that this was something that we are still trying to achieve sixty years after the Council.

When lockdown began, with the suspension of public Mass, I was almost ready to submit my dissertation, having been sent home from Seminary, as had the rest of the community. It was helpfully suggested that I address this dramatic development in my conclusion. The faithful, myself included, were adjusting to participating in Mass online from home. By July public Mass could temporarily resume, but it was far from normal. Things were simplified dramatically, and the usual solemnity minimalised, even on big occasions such as priestly ordinations. How can active participation be possible at this time? Note that it is not all about us *doing* things, even if we may have an important role to play. Active participation is about our *being* during the liturgy. This is very challenging over a livestream, which has an important role as outreach, to evangelise, and in service to those unable to be present physically. However, livestreams cannot be considered the same as being present physically at Mass. The ability actively to participate online is challenging, as I know from personal experience. During the first lockdown I was not able physically to be part of the gathered assembly, physically receive the grace of being present at the Mass being offered, or physically receive Holy Communion.

In terms of ways I found to help my own participation from my own experience of being away from the Sacraments for four months, celebrating the Divine Office, quiet prayer, meditation on scripture and the rosary at other times of the day were essential. I fully appreciate that I had more time for that than many people, but I cannot recommend it highly enough as best as you are able. In terms of trying to participate actively in livestreamed Masses, prayerful reflection of the readings in advance is very helpful, such as techniques for reflection like *Lectio Divina*. Ask your parish priest or another friend for help if you are not sure. This is not an easy situation to flourish in spiritually. We are physical beings, and the liturgy normally makes full use of our senses; a beautiful church; music; incense; the touch and taste of the Eucharist. Understandably this has all been minimalised but we are still called to be a people of hope, and the liturgy assists us in our mission.

At this time we pray that, despite the challenges, we can grow closer to Christ through the transforming power of the liturgy, and that when we are able to worship publicly in a post-Covid

world, our participation will be ever more active and fruitful, just as one is always more grateful for Easter having been through Lent.

## DUST, ASHES & THE LITURGY

Many will have enjoyed the BBC's recent adaptation of Philip Pullman's imaginative work *'His Dark Materials'*. Pullman is a brilliant storyteller. Dust drives his story and governs everything. Dust consists of particles from another world that cause the knowledge of good and evil—or, in Christian language, original sin. The central battles are about discovering the origin and meaning of dust; and for some of the characters, about overcoming the power of dust therefore eliminating the existence of original sin. The philosophy is far from Christian. Yet, the central characters Lyra and Will learn that the moral life, the good life, is not lived in a dust-free vacuum, but rather is lived in the journey and in the choices that we make in a complex world filled with pain and suffering as well as joy and hope.



For the Christian, our journey is reflected powerfully in the Lenten Liturgy. This is our journey from the dust and ashes of Ash Wednesday to the Paschal Vigil, when ashes are washed away ritually in the baptismal waters of Easter. The key to understanding the meaning of the Liturgy of Lent is simple, it's **baptism!** Preparation for Baptism and for renewing baptismal commitment lies at the heart of the season. Since Vatican II, the Church has re-emphasised the baptismal character of Lent,

especially through the restoration of the Rites of the Catechumenate (RCIA) and its Lenten rituals. Our big challenge today is to grasp this renewal and to integrate our personal practices into this renewed perspective. Lent is a real journey from dust and ashes to the waters of the living font.

Dust is indeed a powerful biblical metaphor, for it speaks both to our beginnings and our endings. In creation we are formed from the dust of the earth. In our death we return to the dust... 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust'. Yet through the cleansing waters of baptism, we rise as sons and daughters of Christ, co-heirs of the Kingdom. Ashes are a sign of God's justice, certainly—we have sinned against the Lord who made us—but they are more than that. They are pre-eminently a sign of God's mercy, that he never abandons us to our own sinful ways once we have rejected his grace. God has imbued even dust-bound men and women with the freedom to journey back to him, to be forgiven, to love with a new heart.

Ashes, made from the burned palms of the previous Palm Sunday Liturgy are blessed during Mass, after the homily. Those words "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19) are repeated, again and again. We remember our creatureliness as we begin our Lenten trek through the desert toward the oasis of Easter.

We know that dust settles on all things, and all people die. The ashes remind us that there is more, even in this time of crises and pandemic. For, **now** is a very acceptable time; **now** is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:1-2). This is what the Sacred Liturgy of Lent proclaims!

## Lent - A Journey of Encounter, Healing and Transformation



Lent is one of those seasons that we either dread because of its apparent emphasis on self-denial and self-imposed hardship or one that we embrace with enthusiasm because it is a real opportunity to re-assess our lives and take steps to deepen our relationship with God. To the uninitiated, especially those with no particular religious affiliation, Lent is seen as an austere time when 'giving' up chocolate or alcohol or some other sensuous pleasure appears to be the norm. The emphasis on 'giving things up' not only misses the point of Lent but can cause people to shy away from what can be a deeply enriching aesthetic practice. In addition it can result in people forgetting the other dimensions of Lenten practice such as prayer and almsgiving.

So what is Lent about?

If we think of a wedding or an imminent birth, we will know that many months of preparation go into being ready for these significant occasions. In many ways Lent is not so different. It is a time, lasting 40 days when we prepare to celebrate Easter, the Resurrection of the Lord. As is traditional in the Catholic Church, the beginning of Lent is marked by the ritual marking of ashes on our foreheads, reminding us of our earthly vulnerability. On Ash Wednesday we are reminded through the readings of our need to reacquaint ourselves with the One who loved us into being and continues to love us.

Lent, it seems, is an opportunity, a period of time to reflect, to re-align ourselves spiritually so that when Easter comes we can celebrate with fresh vigour the joy of the resurrection. We can give thanks to God for the gift that Jesus is to the world, his life, death and ultimate rising to new life, in which one day we will share. By participating in the 40 days of Lent we follow Jesus into the desert, a place of wilderness and testing. Whilst Jesus may have gone physically into the desert ours is an inner journey, where through prayer we spend time with God determining where our life is going, considering what God might be asking of us and how far we may have wandered from this path. Ultimately it is a deepening of our daily journey with God. The liturgy of Lent provides us with rich opportunities to engage deeply. The themes of 'encounter, healing and transformation' are pertinent. On his own journey to Jerusalem, Jesus encounters a woman at a well, a blind man in need of healing and a dead man who has been lying in a tomb for four days. Each encounter transforms people. An ostracised woman shares her story and the people of Samaria come to believe. A blind man receives his sight and those around him are astounded. Mary and Martha see their brother brought back to life and many around come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. In each Gospel an encounter leads to some form of healing and then to transformation.

This is what Lent is about.

## Lent Readings – Year B – Covenant



The first reading at Mass on Sundays is almost always from the Old Testament and sometimes it can be difficult to understand why they have been chosen. However, this Lent, as we listen to the readings from Year B, there is a clear theme which links all the old Testament readings together. Each Sunday the first reading draws us ever deeper into an understanding of the covenant.

God wishes to enter into a covenant with us. That is, God wants to enter into a relationship of mutual self-giving love with humanity. God commits himself to us in love and calls us to give ourselves to him in return. In the fourth Eucharistic prayer we pray 'Time and again you offered them covenants and through the prophets taught them to look forward to salvation'.

This year the first reading at Mass each Sunday traces out for us some of the major elements of this covenantal relationship the Lord calls us to respond to. Together they prepare us to celebrate the new covenant which is accomplished in the paschal mystery.

- 1) On the first Sunday of Lent we hear the story of Noah and the Ark. The word covenant is repeated five times. The Lord will establish his covenant with his people and he will be true to it. The response to the psalm reminds us that we are called to keep our part of the covenant.
- 2) On the second Sunday of Lent we hear how the covenant is renewed in Abraham who, for his faithfulness and obedience, receives the promise that his descendants will be as many as the stars of heaven.
- 3) On the third Sunday God gives his law to Moses - the ten commandments which are the heart of the covenant - we are to live by them to be true to the covenant.
- 4) On the fourth Sunday the reading is from the book of Chronicles. This scriptural passage recounts how the people were completely unfaithful to their covenant with God. God allowed the Temple, the place of his presence in Israel, to be destroyed. Yet he does not abandon his people and the reading ends with the Lord's promise that the Temple will be restored and God will always remain faithful.
- 5) On the fifth Sunday of Lent in a reading from the Prophet Jeremiah we hear how God will 'make a new Covenant with the House of Israel.' This new covenant will be different from all others, it will be written upon 'their hearts'. God promises that they will be completely united in a covenant of love. 'Then I will be their God and they will be my people.'

These Old Testament readings lead us, of course to Easter. In Jesus the covenant relationship between God and his people reaches its fulfilment. Until Jesus, God was always faithful and the people often unfaithful. In Christ the two are united as one.

Jesus is truly God and truly human. In his very person he is both God's offer of faithful love and humanity's response. Jesus is the very gift of God's faithful love and, in his humanity, is the perfect response to God. By the pouring out of his blood Jesus Christ establishes the 'new and eternal covenant'.

### **The joy of the Sacrament of Reconciliation**



At the heart of this Lenten journey is the opportunity for reconciliation with God, with our community and within our own self. The problem with reconciliation or the Sacrament of Penance as it is known, is that it has a terribly bad press, which is a pity. Celebrated well, the sacrament offers the greatest opportunity for encounter, healing and transformation. Yet, for many of us it is very hard and we put it off, fearful of what it might involve.

Some years ago Schultz created the Peanuts cartoon. Two of the main characters were Linus and Lucy. Linus is the little boy who walks around with the corner of a blanket in his mouth. Lucy is the one who is bossy and pushes people about. On one occasion Lucy decides that Linus has had his blanket for long enough. She pulls it out of his hands and tells him, rather loudly, that the blanket burning has begun! As she tosses the blanket on to the fire she tells him, 'now your insecurities are symbolically destroyed forever! There, you are now free from the terrible hold on you...you are a new person.' Linus screams in distress. His blanket is his security.

Letting go can involve a real struggle. When we have had a row, hurt another person or been hurt by someone we can find it very difficult to forgive or be forgiven. It can create a barrier between ourselves and others, not to mention God. When we have been hurt we can become stuck and turned in on ourselves sometimes bitter, angry or depressed and because of this our relationships, our work and our pleasure in life is affected. We can be holding on to hurt that stops us from being the real person we are called to be, the person that God wants us to be. At the heart of reconciliation is a journey we make from death to life... not literal death but the kind of death that stops us from living to the full. It is a journey that asks of us to name our pain, to look at its cause and to see what we need to be freed from it. Why would we do this? Primarily because we are at heart good people who want to live in peace and harmony with ourselves and with others and particularly in relationship with God.

Reconciliation is not a moment nor is it something that happens overnight. It can take many years before it leads to forgiveness and to freedom. The symbolic nature of 40 days in Lent is a recognition that these things take time. The Sacrament of Penance helps us on this journey and may well be the ultimate means by which we can celebrate our healing and transformation. God does not want us to be miserable or unhappy or out of sorts with each other. He gave us his Son so that, through freeing us from the power of sin, we may learn to live with hope and joy.

Sadly, it will not be possible this year but often, in Lent, parishes will have a liturgy of reconciliation with the opportunity for individual confession. These can be a rich and rewarding experiences when we are helped to remember that we are not alone in our need to say sorry or find healing. We know that when we sin not only our relationship with God is damaged but it hurts others and the community. Preparing for the sacrament in the company of others by reflecting on readings, singing

appropriate music and joining in prayer strengthens us in our desire to meet God in our sorrow and vulnerability. The joy of unburdening ourselves allows us to continue on our journey to Easter so that when it comes we are ready and able to rejoice with Christ on resurrection day.

### **Celebrating Lent as a family**

Prayer, almsgiving and fasting can be very meaningful if done together as a family. We can support each other through our temptations and weaknesses, encourage each other and deepen our faith as a family unit. There are suggestions below for you to choose as a family. Ask everyone in the family to contribute ideas, make suggestions and then decide what you are going to do together. It is probably more significant to choose one thing for praying, almsgiving and fasting and do it well, supporting each other in your daily journey.

#### **Prayer**

Decide as a family who you would like to pray for during Lent. Take time each day to gather together and pray. Something visual will often help the children to focus. You could make a special prayer chair for Lent, by placing a coloured piece of material on a chair with a cross or statue. More creative people might like to make a prayer tree and add a leaf every time you pray. Prayer chains are also popular where you write who you are praying for and loop them together to create a decorative chain. You could create a family prayer journal together, recording who you pray for and include prayers you write yourselves. The children could decorate your prayer journal and make it a special keepsake.

#### **Some Prayer Ideas:**



- For the people on your Parish prayer list
- For Pope Francis, Bishop Declan and the Priests in Clifton Diocese
- For the staff in the schools and colleges in Clifton Diocese
- You could pray for the light of Christ to come into someone else's life
- For different countries around the world

Hospitals around the country

Staff in local foodbank and homeless charities

Use the Five Finger Prayer created by Pope Francis which is available on the Mission Together website [here](#)

Zoom call your grandparents and pray together with them

Pray outdoors - when the weather is better you might like to go on a prayer walk together in your garden or local park stopping to pray for the creation around you. Barefoot prayer walks in the garden are lovely as you can feel nature around you. For children who are early risers praying over a sunrise breakfast in the garden is beautiful and spiritual. You can make prayer stones by decorating stones with chalk and felt pens.



## **Fasting**

Have a family fast together you could refrain from sweets or junk food during the week. With children you could plan in a 'cheat' day on a Sunday, especially Mothering Sunday so the task feels less daunting for them. Everyone in the family could choose different things to fast from and then you all encourage each other. Keep track of the money you are saving to help others. Fasting isn't just about food: giving up screens which would include TV, tablets, phones, games could really make a difference to family life during Lent. Discuss an amount of time that would be manageable for your family, but it should be about 30 minutes to an hour a day for it to make a difference. During this time, you could spiritually reflect or just enjoy time as a family by talking to each other and playing games.

## **Almsgiving**

Choose a charity you would like to support as a family. This could be an overseas charity or a local one. Create an almsgiving box together and put in money you have saved from fasting. The money can be written on pieces of paper and shared out, so everyone is able to contribute and see how much you raise.

With so much uncertainty surrounding us, we pray that during Lent you stay safe and look after your family unit. We hope that you find at least some of these ideas spiritually uplifting.

## **Stations of the Cross**

Traditionally, we will pray the stations of the Cross during Lent and we have collated some links for praying these with children or as a family:

<https://missiontogether.org.uk/prayer-resources/> a lovely version for Primary children on a ppt

<https://missio.org.uk/lent/stations-of-the-cross/> a version for older children on a ppt

<https://cafod.org.uk/Education/Secondary-and-youth-resources/Lent-resources-young-people> a version for Secondary children on the CAFOD website which links with their Lent appeal

<https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/lent/stations-of-the-cross/multimedia-stations-of-the-cross-for-children> another children's version available in a PDF and PPT format

<https://thegodwhospeaks2020.org.uk/index.php/tag/stations-of-the-cross/> recorded last year

You could even make your own family version or encourage the children to act out the Stations of the Cross using Lego or toy figures.

## **New resource - Celebrating the Mass**

Booklet and individual pages available [here](#)

**Wishing you a very blessed Lent and Easter – stay safe and well!**