

# SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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PARISH UPDATE 48

Greetings all!

And so we have come to the Season of Lent!

As well as being a great season in our annual growth in faith, it carries a heavy reminder of the past twelve months. Last year we gathered for Ash Wednesday and the First Sunday of Lent as usual, and then our churches were closed. That became the year of restrictions, easing of restrictions, lockdown, and repeat all over again.

Twelve months on we were suddenly closed for Ash Wednesday, and now re-open for that First Sunday of Lent. It's been a year of ..... (fill in the blank for yourself!).

The Blessing and Distribution of Ashes is a very public 'sacramental' by which we deliberately set ourselves into the renewal of our lives of faith, culminating in that great Holy Week of Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter.

This year we will have that ritual of the Ashes during each of this coming weekend's Masses.

Ashes are what remain after a fire has gone out. The cross of Ashes on our foreheads signifies that we know that the 'fire of faith' may have gone out in part since last Easter. We are not perfect, and that may have shown up in our thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions over the year since last Easter. The 'fire of faith' needs to be rekindled. The cross of Ashes on our foreheads indicates that we are ready to change and to make efforts to set our lives firmly on the way of Christ. For those not able/permitted to gather in our churches (we still have that limit of 190 places at each Mass, for which bookings are essential to monitor that) – I suggest that you deliberately pause in these early days of Lent and acknowledge that we are into a new Season now, the Season of Lent.

To assist with this, our Church urges us to focus more than usual on three basic Christian responses: **prayer, fasting, and good works**. An attachment with this letter explores this, coming from the Archbishop.

We will move into autumn while Lent is under way – officially that happens on 1<sup>st</sup> March. This has a helpful symbolism. As autumn arrives the leaves will fall away from trees enabling the light of the sun to shine through. For us at St Albans and Sydenham the changing colours and falling leaves are harder to find amongst the native trees. Perhaps there's helpful symbolism in that, too: to undertake the renewal of Lent, we may have to look quite closely at ourselves to see what is 'due for a change'.

There is an attachment with this letter from Pope Francis, focusing on that time-honoured practice during Lent of prayer – 'A day that begins with prayer is a good day'.

Another time-honoured practice is that of 'reaching beyond ourselves in good works'. A way of doing that is by participating in the works of Caritas Australia through Project Compassion. There are Project Compassion boxes and sets of envelopes in the foyers of our churches. And you can donate online via the Caritas Australia website at: [lent.caritas.org.au](http://lent.caritas.org.au). Saint Oscar Romero is the inspiration for Project Compassion 2021, with his words "Let's aspire not to

have more, but to *be* more.” There’s much more information available at that website about the works of Caritas Australia, and some prayers and reflections for the Season.

The St Vincent de Paul Society recognised our care and thoughtfulness for others and our generosity when they sent the attached letter in appreciation of the proceeds from our ‘giving trees’ at Christmas time - \$2,485. That is one of the sure signs of faith, our Scriptures tell us.

With the arrival of the vaccines now in the news these days, Archbishop has written urging us to take up the opportunity to be vaccinated as soon as that is possible. His letter is attached. He has also written about the Sacrament of Confirmation for this year. It seems that he is anticipating that the limited numbers allowed in our church will continue for some time, and so has asked that each Parish develop its own plan for sharing this Sacrament with our young people in 2021. I will keep you informed about that. And our Primary Schools will keep all families ‘in the loop’.

And so, into Lent. We are people of faith, but not completely yet. We know Jesus Christ, but not altogether yet. We live in the way of the gospels, but not perfectly yet. The Season of Lent focuses us on the incompleteness of our lives of faith, with the invitation to continue to grow in faith, in knowledge of the Lord, and in action for the sake of the gospel of Christ. We can achieve all this, because the grace of Christ will be renewed in us. That’s what we celebrate joyously at Easter. The path to that is in participating in the Season of Lent.

Have a good Lent!

Maurie Cooney  
(Parish Priest)