

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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PARISH UPDATE 49

Hello everyone!

So Lent is under way.

A side effect of not being permitted to gather on Ash Wednesday because of that lockdown was that many more people were able to 'take the Ashes' as we distributed them at all the Masses over the weekend.

They are a great symbol. Ashes are the result of the fire going out. I think of that phrase in our tradition of 'the flame of faith'. Have parts of the flame of faith gone out in our lives since last Easter? Be renewed in our lives of faith this Lent, and celebrate that new life in Christ at Easter: that's the process of Lent for us.

In his homily on Ash Wednesday, Pope Francis reflected on Lent as a journey of return to God and as an opportunity to deepen our love of our brothers and sisters. "It is a time to reconsider the path we are taking," he said, "to find the route that leads us home and to rediscover our profound relationship with God, on whom everything depends."

There's also that age-old practice of 'giving something up for Lent'. Pope Francis has something to say about this, too: 'no acts of virtue can be great unless they are followed up by making advantages for others'. If we are going to give up anything for Lent, he recommends a fast from indifference to others and to God!

Along these lines there is an attachment with this letter in which the writer begins by wondering that 'we've been forced to give up so much already in the past year - nearly everybody has experienced *involuntary* self-denial ranging from the prohibition of travel and leisure activities to imposed distance from loved ones and family members, including the tragedy of not being with loved ones in person as they left this world at the end of life?' He goes on to remember that the basic in Lent is 'to take something on' - that may be a new attitude, a new awareness, a new hopefulness, a new peacefulness, a new awareness of God in our life.

This 'taking something on for Lent' is also in the prayer that is attached - 'Stepping forward into Lent: give me something new and good'.

Again this year in our churches we have the symbol of the 'twisted willow' on the sanctuaries. At the start of Lent, the branches had shed their old leaves, leaving some promising green buds. Already a week later new growth is showing out. The difference has been brought about by placing those branches in water. It's a great 'parable': Lent is for shedding some of our behaviours and attitudes that are not in line with the Gospel of Jesus, and for growing in ourselves new aspects of the life of Jesus. Our touchstone for this is our Baptism into the life of Christ and of the Church - we take the Water of Baptism anew at Easter.

Amongst the media headlines during this week has been the roll-out of the vaccine. With last week's letter there was Archbishop Comensoli's recommendation that we all take 'the jab' when our 'category' is called. He talked about the moral responsibility of taking care of ourselves and of others around us by taking the vaccine.

With the elderly near the top of the queue, I noticed a statement from the Vatican ' Pandemic shows need for new model of care for elderly' - see another attachment with this letter.

The stretch of last year's major lockdown reaches into Parish life again over the next few weeks. Our young Parishioners who were scheduled to share in First Reconciliation and First Communion last year had their celebrations cancelled. Starting on this Saturday with two gatherings for First Communion at Sacred Heart, we begin to overcome that by calling this first group to share in the Meal of Eucharist at the Table of the Lord.

Then during next week at Emmaus, we gather over three evenings with young Parishioners and their families for their first experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Once again, the Principals, Religious Education Leaders and staffs of our Schools are putting in great commitments to ensure that these are true celebrations of our young people's becoming more part of the life of Christ and of the Church.

For our overall Parish, a feature of our Lent prayer is our Service of Prayer and Reconciliation (which includes the opportunity for the First Rite of the Sacrament of Penance – that is, face-to-face 'Confession'). The dates for those are:

at Sacred Heart: Tuesday 23rd March at 7.30pm

at Emmaus: Thursday 25th March at 7.30pm.

The 'Penitential Rite during Lent' which is attached may be helpful preparation for that over the next few weeks.

Our planning is shaping up well for our customary Good Friday Procession – to be held this year on the grounds of Sacred Heart St Albans because of COVID-safe restrictions. When the details are finalised I will let you know. As for all our gatherings, bookings will be essential so that we conform with the COVID-safe regulations.

With the end of summer officially coming this weekend, our experience continues to be 'out of kilter', do you feel – only a small number of hot days and warm nights. And this on top of our still living with COVID-safe 'new normal' patterns: limits on gatherings, masks, sanitising, and the uncertainty of 'when will we be through this?'.
Take care ... stay well ... take 'the jab' ... be of good spirits!

Maurie Cooney
(Parish Priest)