

Reflection for 1st Sunday of Lent Year B

Lent will be different and challenging this year for us as we work out what we can do. Many of our liturgical practices that we would have associated with the season of Lent are not possible during the pandemic. We may find a strange emptiness, not knowing how to fill the gaps or the days. However, it may also be an opportunity to think and live Lent in a different way. Some may not like this; others may see it as a breath of fresh air. We could look at and engage with the season of Lent in a different way. Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

We have all found that our lives have been turned upside down over the last year. Making sense of life has been difficult; making sense of our faith has been a challenge. Trying to plan both almost seems impossible. The routines to both our life and our faith have probably never been so disorganised, lost and even confused. They may lack focus and vision and perhaps even purpose. We feel that we may have to start all over again. As we start Lent during this extraordinary year, let us reflect on these words of Pope Francis from his message for Lent this year called, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem” (Mt 20:18) Lent: a Time for Renewing Faith, Hope and Love. Hopefully, they will inspire us to deepen our life of faith. May we journey together as pilgrims to commemorate and celebrate the Easter Triduum.

“The Samaritan woman at the well, whom Jesus asks for a drink, does not understand what he means when he says that he can offer her “living water” (Jn 4:10). Naturally, she thinks that he is referring to material water, but Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit whom he will give in abundance through the paschal mystery, bestowing a hope that does not disappoint. Jesus had already spoken of this hope when, in telling of his passion and death, he said that he would “be raised on the third day” (Mt 20:19). Jesus was speaking of the future opened up by the Father’s mercy. Hoping with him and because of him means believing that history does not end with our mistakes, our violence and injustice, or the sin that crucifies Love. It means receiving from his open heart the Father’s forgiveness.

In these times of trouble, when everything seems fragile and uncertain, it may appear challenging to speak of hope. Yet Lent is precisely the season of hope, when we turn back to God who patiently continues to care for his creation which we have often mistreated (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 32-33; 43-44). Saint Paul urges us to place our hope in reconciliation: “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). By receiving forgiveness in the sacrament that lies at the heart of our process of conversion, we in turn can spread forgiveness to others. Having received forgiveness ourselves, we can offer it through our willingness to enter into attentive dialogue with others and to give comfort to those experiencing sorrow and pain. God’s forgiveness, offered also through our words and actions, enables us to experience an Easter of fraternity.

In Lent, may we be increasingly concerned with “speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn” (Fratelli Tutti, 223). In order to give hope to others, it is sometimes enough simply to be kind, to be “willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference” (Fratelli Tutti 224).