

## Reflection for 2nd Sunday of Lent Year B

We have all had to accept the fact that we have had to be content, this year, with a digital Lent. Places of worship remain closed. For many, this has become a cross or even a bereavement. The emptiness of Lent is stark; a void requires to be filled. These days are tough for people and the growing signs of lockdown on people's livelihood are becoming more and more evident each week. We can see the strain on people's faces. The emptiness is tangible. The lack of a life-giving Lent has been for some a burden too heavy to bear.

If it had been suggested to us that we may have had to consider a digital Lent this year, we may have laughed or even given the onlooker a strange or perhaps a disdainful look. Subconsciously under our breathe, we may have been saying to ourselves, you must be joking! Sadly, that joke has now become a painful reality. We may feel at sea, apparently feeling powerless in our Lenten faith. However, all is not lost! Although it is far from ideal, there are a significant number of resources online for Lent which can be accessed with relative ease. They can help us and can make Lent worthwhile and energising. We are having to celebrate Lent in a different way even with a certain amount of reluctance. We may have found that we have also been thrown out of comfort zone! People will continue to feel lonely and isolated. Perhaps even more so this year, they are not able to journey with the worshipping and liturgical community of faith that they would have expected to do as they have done in the past. Their pain is visible and as people of faith, they are hurting. There are a lot of wounded and bruised pilgrims this year in the Church and in the world. We are not alone, although there is a temptation to think that we are. All we need to do is to listen to the radio, watch the television, or even read online and we will realise that we are anything but isolated in our pain. That pain and suffering is global. Lent is different this year and we need to find a pathway that helps us celebrate it without losing the focus of what it is about. In that light let us take some consolation from these words from the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who frequently encouraged people of faith to keep going in difficult times.

“One significant contribution of religion today is that it preserves what society as a whole has begun to lose: that strong sense of being there for one another, of being ready to exercise mutual aid, to help people in need, to comfort the distressed and bereaved, to welcome the lonely, to share in other people's sadnesses and celebrations. These moral responses have not disappeared: we see them whenever there is a communal tragedy, a shooting, a terrorist incident or a major accident. People come together to give help and support. Our wellsprings of altruism have not run dry. They are a large part of what makes us human. But we tend not to exercise them on a day-to-day basis. That is what we have lost in society at large, but what can still be found in religious congregations. These remain, as Robert Pulam went on to demonstrate in *American Grace*, our strongest living embodiments of social capital.

That availability of collective strength that we find in strong communities held together by moral bonds is an important source of resilience that we will need as we face the kind of uncertainty that seems to be the mark of the twenty-first century thus far. It is easier to face the future without fear when we know we do not do so alone.

We have lived through an extended period during which the 'I' has grown stronger at the expense of the 'We'. The result, as American sociologist Robert Bellah put it, is that our 'social ecology' has been damaged by 'the destruction of the subtle ties that bind human beings to one another, leaving them frightened and alone.' In the long run, that is unsustainable. The human condition is overwhelmingly about relationships – about faithfulness, staying true, loyal and committed to one another despite all the tensions, setbacks, misunderstandings, backslidings, and all the multiple ways in which we fall short. It is consecrating the bonds between us. It is about transcending our solitude.”

Jonathan Sacks, “**Morality: Restoring the Common Good in divided times,**” pages 36/37