

## Reflection for 3rd Sunday of Lent Year B

It has been quite a week! The budget was announced earlier in the week and we now wait to see how it affects us in both the short and long-term! Pope Francis is currently in Iraq making his historical visit amidst tight security and the ongoing pandemic! Fear, uncertainties, and insecurities continue to be part of all our lives. We all seem to have lived with difficult and unknown situations that appear to be determined by “will it happen? Will places of worship be open? or What might the restrictions be for each building after restrictions have been lifted?” Its almost a year since we closed our churches on 19th March last year. That was a sad and difficult day for many parishes and their parishioners. As Pope Francis makes his way through the different engagements during his apostolic journey of Iraq, many people will be emotionally moved, while others will no doubt ponder and reflect that this is no longer a dream but a living reality. Social media has many pictures and comments to reflect on Pope Francis’ 33rd apostolic journey, clearly one of the most sensitive and diplomatic journeys of his papacy. History, in time, will tell its own story.

Closer to home, a week does not go by when we do not read about a tragedy or a story where people are wounded or left hurt perhaps physically or emotionally. The emotional scars of lockdown and the pandemic are beginning to show, let alone the financial implications for many a household. The speculation of how and when we might move out of lockdown is also beginning to take its strain on the lives of individuals who might feel that there is very little to be positive about for the future. As Pope Francis visits Iraq, he does so in a spirit of peace and of hope. It is also a historical moment for the Church and the world. It is a poignant moment for inter-religious dialogue, as a country which has suffered from so much violence and warfare has now welcomed the successor of Peter. How times have changed! This is a grace-filled moment. We should be encouraged by what we see or read online or on the television. It is sometimes difficult for us at times to find a life-giving and faith filled faith but perhaps these thoughts by Chris Lowney, a former Jesuit scholastic and managing director of J.P. Morgan & Co may help us to persevere in our Lenten pilgrimage.

“The first step to a change culture is depicting the new one, and Francis has started painting a picture. He portrays a humbler and simpler Church. He wants a Church more closely identified with those at societies peripheries- the poor, vulnerable and marginalised. “How I would like a Church that is poor and for the poor,” he told journalists. He envisions a Church that proactively, joyfully engages the world (and its own lapsed members) with its message.”

He comes back to these few ideas again and again, critically important for any leader. Perhaps his predecessors’ calls to urgency were faint, among many reasons, because they were swallowed up and lost in the wide river of papal pronouncements, sermons and encyclicals. Eloquent and learned though these words may be, and essential though they are for deepening the tradition, how many Catholics read even half of them? One per cent of Catholics? Fewer? Instead, what has eluded us, and what we ordinary Catholics need, is not every answer to every question but a compelling answer to one question: what are we Catholics called to be and do amid the turbulence of this new century? The answer, though surely not a sound bite or snappy slogan, must nonetheless be a simple, direct, guiding vision that Catholics can grasp and hang onto; it must feel relevant to our lives.

Oh, and one more thing: that guiding idea must be a call to action, which gets to the second step in massive cultural change: translating vision into action. Pope Francis’s approach bears more than a passing resemblance to Ignatius’s activist response to the Church’s crisis of his time, and fortuitously, the Pope’s instincts happen to align well with best practice principles for galvanizing organisations around change.”

**Chris Lowney: “Pope Francis: why he leads the way he leads,” pages 126/127**