



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

*Pastoral Letter of
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Dear Family of God,

Sometimes it is really hard to start! Like Lent. This year it is only forty days after Christmas and we are already into the forty days of Lent; Prayer, fasting and almsgiving. So where to begin?

“The Lord God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living thing.” (Gen 2:7)

Lent is essentially about Life: human life. Lent is a time when we recall our beginnings: that we are created by God – we are nothing till God breathes life into us. The breath we draw is gift from God: breath shared with God: the kiss of life.

Lent is when our prayer is turned towards the wonder and awe of God and Life. Sometimes it's hard to start because we are not in the habit of looking beyond ourselves *“A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me”* (Ps 50), and looking at God will certainly ask us to think about the reason for our existence. So, regular prayer will help us to live life to the full. *“Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* (Matt 4)

“The Lord God caused to spring up from the soil every kind of tree enticing to look at and good to eat” (Gen 2)

The Providential God, provider of all that we need to live! Through our prayer for a pure heart (i.e. not being isolated from God) we learn to discern the things that are really essential for a healthy life. Physical needs – though important – are not as important as our spiritual need to be one with God. If I know the love of God for real, then I have the power – the steadfast spirit within me, to cope with, face up to any physical trial. So the fasting in Lent is to help us focus on developing the gift of the steadfast spirit that we are praying for. Fasting opens up a veritable feast of the good things that knowing God in human life can bring. Lenten Fasting is about your spiritual life not your physical life. Not “body beautiful” but beautiful soul. Our Providential God *“will put you in his angels’ charge, and they will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.”* (Ps 91)

But those are the words the Devil used in the Gospel! But don't you remember the devil is the world's best at spin and twisting things?

"Then the serpent said...No! You will not die! God knows in fact that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil."

Almsgiving stops us wanting to be God. Almsgiving calls us to recognise the value of the life of everyone: to recognise the right of everyone to life! To recognise that by giving of my life I enable life for another. Almsgiving is much more than justice; it is the way for us to understand the loving mercy of God who redeems us in Christ. *"In gratuitously offering himself, the Christian bears witness that it is love and not material richness that determines the laws of his existence. Love then, gives almsgiving its value."* (Benedict XVI Lenten Message 2008).

St Peter Chrysologus taught that there are three ways of ensuring that faith remains strong, and devotion and virtue remain constant. They are the three foundations of Lent; prayer, fasting and almsgiving. He said: prayer calls, fasting intercedes, and almsgiving receive.

So where to begin?

"The Lord God fashioned man of dust from the soil (prayer calls).

Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life (fasting intercedes),

and thus man became a living being" (almsgiving receives).

Live Lent!

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*Given at Wardley Hall on Saturday, February 02, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord,
and appointed to be read in all churches and chapels of the diocese
on the weekend of February 10, 2008, the First Sunday of Lent*