

An Intentional Lent

Lenten pastoral letter to the Church of Armidale
Ash Wednesday, 2 March 2022

*At any and every moment in life we each face difficulties and challenges.
As we begin Lent this year, I am particularly conscious of
three challenges faced by us as members of the Church and wider society.
(I recognise, of course, that there are others too)*

Three Challenges

First, the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine is a stark reminder to us that the world of geopolitics is not as peaceful and stable as perhaps we thought it was.

Second, whilst we are grateful and cautiously hopeful that our daily life continues to return to normal following COVID-19 restrictions, it is evident that many have not yet returned to participation in the Eucharistic life of the Church at Sunday Mass.

Third, we see that human society continues to be characterised by an increasing polarisation and disconnect whereby anyone who acts differently, thinks differently, or has different opinions to us may be considered and treated by us as “one of them” rather than “one of us.”

Pope Francis addressed this worrying trend in his 2020 encyclical letter Fratelli Tutti in which he set out to “encourage us to recognize one another as brothers and sisters and to live accordingly in the common home that the Father has entrusted to us.”

Three Holy Practices

The Church in Lent, following the teaching of Jesus in Chapter 6 of Matthew’s Gospel which is proclaimed to us at the Ash Wednesday Mass, urges us to redouble our efforts in prayer, fasting, and good deeds, and to undertake these three holy practices in a spirit of simplicity and humility. So, I ask that as you pray, fast, and do good deeds this Lent that you consciously bring before the Lord:

- The people of Ukraine and Russia and pray for peace in our world;
- Our brothers and sisters who are still to return to Sunday Mass;
- The desire for greater fraternity, tolerance, and communion with one another.

Our efforts in the three Lenten actions are not somehow distinct from and unrelated to the three challenges I have placed before us, nor are they disconnected from our own everyday trials and difficulties.

You see, when we pray, fast, and perform good deeds out of love for God and our neighbour and a desire to grow in Christian holiness we are not acting as automated robots. No, we are acting as free human beings who consciously bring to the Lord all our hopes and dreams, joys and sorrows, trials and triumphs.

Making A Good Start

One of the keys, for me, to a successful Lent is simply to begin it well. This means making a deliberate decision now about what extra prayer, fasting, and good deeds (or almsgiving) to undertake rather than just drifting into Lent.

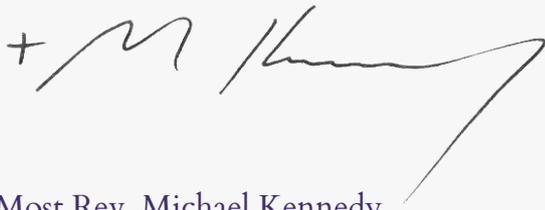
For prayer you could decide to attend an extra Mass each week, spend some time in Eucharistic adoration, or commit to regular family prayer. For fasting you might give up one of your favourite foods or drinks. For a good deed you might invite somebody to return to Sunday Mass or ask them to come with you, and there are many good charities to which you can give a meaningful (sacrificial) donation – not just your spare change or coffee money!

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In his Lenten message Pope Francis said “Fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, as preached by Jesus enable and express our conversion. The path of poverty and self-denial (fasting), concern and loving care for the poor (almsgiving), and childlike dialogue with the Father (prayer) make it possible for us to live lives of sincere faith, living hope and effective charity.”

I suggest that we each start by making a commitment to prayer this Lent. In beginning with prayer which Pope Francis calls “childlike dialogue with the Father” especially before Jesus Christ in the Eucharist we nourish our own hearts so that our fasting and good deeds may bear lasting fruit for ourselves and for others.

Let’s not be aimless going wherever the wind blows us or others want to lead us. Let us live a decisive Lent as intentional disciples of Jesus Christ.



Most Rev. Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Armidale

