

PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE : Lent – *‘Experiencing Our Humanity!’*

20 / 21 February 2010

Dear Friends

Around this time of year, there are some wonderful descriptions of what Lent might be for us. It's not the easiest Season to embrace but if we keep in mind that Lent is truly a Season of Joy where we journey in the awareness of the Risen Jesus in our midst, we may see it with fresh eyes. One liturgy resource gives us a prescription for a 'healthful' Lent – *Pray privately, give alms quietly, fast cheerfully!* (Celebration February 2010)

Writer Fr James Smith describes these as forming a pyramid of right relationships, establishing our relationship with God in love (prayer), our relationship with others in compassion (almsgiving), and our relationship with our own self in humility (fasting) – and we must do all three! These may be difficult at times but they are 'the best teachers of humanity'.

Lent is the Season when we seek to discover, in Fr Smith's words, 'the flesh-and-blood structure of our humanity'. Alas, our humanness is too much with us in our times, yet so many live in a spirit of individualism fuelled by consumerism. We must never become disconnected from everyday life and so our Lenten observance needs the three pillars of prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

In a wonderful little book of Lenten reflections, Sacred Space for Lent 2010, we are challenged by the Church to test our freedom and to question the notion: *I can take it or leave it alone*. Areas where we might do this include, 'grumbling, drunkenness, talking about yourself, stealing, gambling, or other habits that diminish our freedom.' Our habits sometimes lead us by the nose and it is not a pretty sight!

Some of our failings are institutional, as evidenced in the Irish Report on Sexual Abuse. It is 10 years since the Church, through the Pope and the Australian Catholic Bishops, made a public apology for the failure and sins of Catholics and the Church during the last 2000 years. It was the time of the Great Jubilee and these apologies recognised the many people who have been hurt by our Church and still carry hurts and scars today. Some may have been abused verbally or physically, some were hurt by lack of sensitivity, some were victims of abuse of power, some felt ostracised because their marriage failed.

The three pillars of Lenten observance can prepare our hearts and enable us to say a simple 'sorry', which can mean so much and must be said. They can also prepare us to receive an apology gracefully and gladly – not always the easiest thing to do. Let's be honest – both offering and receiving an apology are difficult because in neither case are we 'in control', usually not the place we'd like to be!

Our responsibility as Christians is to make the Church strong but the means of doing that are often seen as signs of weakness – repentance, forgiveness and saying sorry. But then that's what Jesus did, isn't it?

Fr Dave

PS You can visit the Sacred Space website daily. Just go to our Home Page, click on the Formation button at the top of the page and then click on the Sacred Space button for instructions.