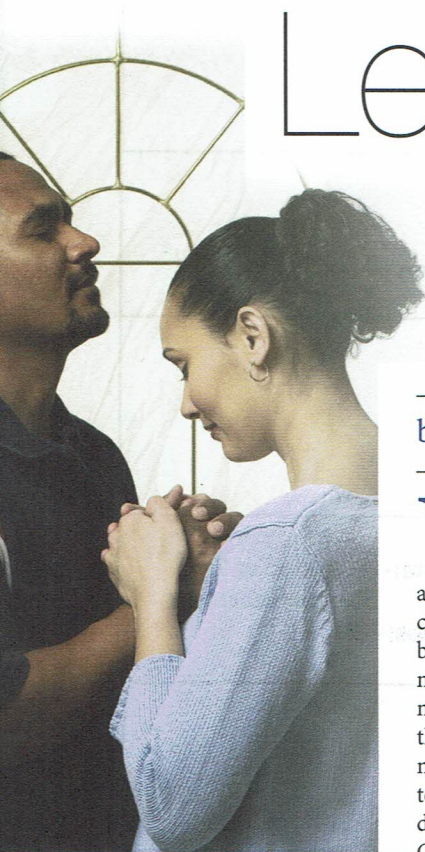


SUNDAY PLUS

Start afresh



Lent's transforming opportunities

by Eileen Cole

We have begun this challenging, powerful season of Lent, a privileged time of interior conversion. Lent and Easter can be lived in many ways and bring many helpful, personal lessons. A metaphor for this season could be that of death and resurrection. By mortification and penance we “die to ourselves”, our whims and tastes during the forty days of Lent, so that Christ may rise anew in our lives

throughout, but especially at Easter.

Scripture presents our relationship with God as a continual returning to his infinite love which calls us to live in communion with him. We are weak, fragile, sinners who need a humble attitude and penance to be in communion with God, to “seek his face”. We must reverse the paths that lead to evil, change our behaviour and possibly our ways of thinking, which are in opposition to the will and the word of God.

From the very beginning of his Messianic ministry, Jesus launched his call to conversion: “Repent and believe the good news”. The

Church repeats that message with urgency now in Lent. Conversion fundamentally consists of moving away from sin with the help of the grace which is to be found in abundance in the sacrament of reconciliation. The sacrament offers us the opportunity for a breaking open of our heart and bad habits to ask for God’s forgiveness, to be reconciled with him and to begin afresh. If we live Lent in this way, we can hope for an extraordinary spiritual transformation.

Eileen Cole is a Media Officer with the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales.

Starve the sin, not the bin

by Dr Philip Alton

Lent is not an opportunity to become “good” people, and be “worthy” of God: rather, it’s an opportunity to invite the Lord into the worst in our life. God’s reconciliation does not need us to be perfect: it only requires us to examine our faults honestly, allow ourselves to feel sorrow appropriate to these (not more), and make amends to those we have hurt. In reconciliation, we begin anew in Christ.

This is accomplished in a definitive and certain way through the sacrament of reconciliation, so Lent is a perfect time for this.

Prayer, fasting and alms-giving – the pillars of Lent – enable us to open our hearts to God’s loving transformation. Therefore, it is

important to balance things given up, with equal measures of kindness and prayer. In Lent, we have an opportunity to experience the incredible joy of forgiveness and new beginnings. With grace, we can become perfect.

Dr Philip Alton, a medical doctor, also works to be “a voice for the voiceless”.

“**Lent comes to us as a providential time to change course, to recover the ability to react to the reality of evil which always challenges us. Lent is to be lived as a time of conversion, as a time of renewal.**

Pope Francis

Lead us not into temptation

by Des Kelly

Pope Francis reminds us that temptation is always present in our lives and without temptation we cannot progress in faith. In the Lord’s Prayer we ask that the temptation will not be too strong and lead us into evil. Many people are intimidated by the fact that they are tempted; they feel they shouldn’t even be in that situation or that they should be able to control it. But you shouldn’t feel guilty about temptation. It’s not a sin to be tempted. It is a sin to give in to temptation to do the wrong thing. The Bible shows us that Jesus experienced every temptation known to man, but he didn’t sin. Temptation is not a sin. It’s how you respond to it that matters. God has given us ways to fight against evil.

Adoration of the Eucharist, reading the word of God, staying close to Mary and obedience to God’s will are sure means to being victorious in the spiritual battle.

Des Kelly, a retired headteacher, now works to develop leadership in Catholic schools and parishes.

Dear Lord, making a fresh start is not always easy. It needs time, energy and patience with myself and others. Help me, Lord, to see Lent as a chance for new beginnings. Stay with me, Lord, as I try to come closer to you. Amen.

Today:

Genesis 9:8-15
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:12-15

Monday:

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18
Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday:

Isaiah 55:10-11
Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday:

Jonah 3:1-10
Luke 11:29-32

Thursday:

1 Peter 5:1-4
Matthew 16:13-19

Friday:

Ezekiel 18:21-28
Matthew 5:20-26

Saturday:

Deuteronomy 26:16-19
Matthew 5:43-48

Next Sunday:

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18
Romans 8:31-34
Mark 9:2-10