

Pastoral Letter: Lent 2023

My Dear People,



As we know the Season of Lent is patterned after Jesus' forty days in the wilderness before beginning his public ministry. The earliest mention of Lent in the history of the Church comes from the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. The English word 'Lent' comes from the Anglo-Saxon word meaning to lengthen. Lent comes at a time when the daytime hours are 'lengthening', as spring approaches, and so it is a time when we too can 'lengthen' spiritually, when we can stretch out and grow in the Spirit.

We have a beautiful play on the words, 'sun' and 'Son', which are pronounced identically. Just as the sun does the work of 'lengthening' the days in spring, so it is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who does the work of 'lengthening' our spiritual growth. During the Season of Lent we are to cooperate with God's grace and initiative. Scripture and the early Church suggest a variety of ways in which this 'lengthening' might come about, a variety of ways in which we can cooperate with God's grace.

This Season of Lent affords us the opportunity to detach, unplug, disconnect, and find an experience of desert. Pope Francis said, "Lent is a time to disconnect from cell phones and connect to the Gospel." He said that in a world in which we often struggle to distinguish the

voice of the Lord, Jesus calls us into the desert and invites us to listen to what matters.

Traditionally we have been taught that the Season of Lent is a time set aside for fasting, almsgiving and prayer. The exercise of these virtues keeps us close to God and keeps us focused on service to others. Fasting is an act of self-denial and a way of directing our thoughts away from ourselves and towards our God. Almsgiving is the act by which we give of ourselves in order to assist someone in need. Prayer should be the centre of our Christian lives lifting up our hearts in praise and thanksgiving to our God who loves us.

Pope Francis said, "If we enter the desert with Jesus, we will leave it at Easter when the power of God's love renews life." He said, just like those deserts that bloom in spring with buds and plants suddenly sprouting from the sand, if we follow Jesus, our deserts will also bloom. Hence under the banner of Care For our Common Home, we have a beautiful Lenten poster showing new life blossoming in the desert. May this Season of Lent lead us to renewal and new life at Easter.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Wayne Kirkpatrick

Bishop Wayne Kirkpatrick

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