

Richard



Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

**PASTORAL LETTER
for the 1st Sunday of Lent
6th March 2022**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today, we begin the wonderful Season of Lent, a season “ordered to preparing for the celebration of Easter, since the Lenten Liturgy prepares for celebration of the Paschal Mystery both catechumens, by the various stages of Christian Initiation, and the faithful, who recall their own Baptism and do penance.”¹ It is the season that brings us to the very heart of our Christian Faith – the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ – and our sharing in His life as members of His Body, the Church, through our Baptism. It is a time for renewal, a time when we are called to look at ourselves in our relationship with the Lord who has given Himself for us. When we reflect on the wonder of our Salvation, when we think of the Lord’s saving love for us, there can be only one response: love for Him.

In the Gospel for this First Sunday of Lent, we read of the temptations of the Lord in the desert. Each of the temptations – the satisfaction of physical hunger, the offer of worldly power, the very testing of God Himself – Jesus rebuffs with the response that God comes first: life by His Word, Worship and service of Him alone, the acknowledgement of God’s supremacy in all things. So for us, God comes before all else.

Moses, as we hear in this Sunday’s first reading,¹ instructs the people that God’s care for them, his deliverance of them from slavery, calls for worship and thanksgiving, the recognition that God is All.

The Season of Lent is a gift to us. It is a season of penance, but for one reason only – that we be reminded of the truths proclaimed in the Scriptures. That God is All, that the Lord has saved us through His Passion, Death and Resurrection.

Let us use this gift of Lent wisely, recognising afresh that our response to all that the Lord has done for us must be one of worship, faithfulness, service of our brothers and sisters and lives lived ever closer to Him.

St. Bernard, writing on the love of God, points out to us that the love that God has shown us in the person of His Son calls for one response: our love for Him.

¹ Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, n.27.

It is this love that motivates our sharing in the Eucharist Sunday-by-Sunday. A celebration in which we rejoice, joining with our brothers and sisters in our thanksgiving for the Salvation that the Lord has won for us.

Pope St. John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter on keeping the Lord's Day holy (*Dies Domini*), includes a quotation from a third century text called The Didascalia: "Leave everything on the Lord's Day and run diligently to your assembly, because it is your praise of God. Otherwise, what excuse will they make to God, those who do not come together on the Lord's Day to hear the word of life and feed on the divine nourishment which lasts forever?"² There is a sense of excitement and purpose here – the praise of God comes before all else and we are called to drop what we are doing and hasten to the church, to be with our brothers and sisters as the Body of Christ, to share in the Eucharist – simply out of love for Him.

May this Lenten Season be a time of ever-deeper discovery of all the Lord has done for us. As we renew our openness to His love, recognising that nothing comes before the worship of God, that nothing must come in a higher place than the One who formed us out of love, we shall be enabled to grow ever closer to the person of Jesus and, through being His people, be also His witnesses.

With every Blessing,

+Richard

² POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* on keeping the Lord's Day holy, 1998, n.46.