

ALL SAINTS WEST DULWICH

Lent 2020

Befriended by Christ



No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one's life for one's friends.

John 15:13

LENT

Over the next few months, we will be immersed in gospel accounts of Christ's ministry, his death, resurrection and ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

This 'death and resurrection cycle' begins on the first day of Lent: Ash Wednesday.

It concludes on the last day of the Easter season: the Day of Pentecost (when the church was born).

This year, **Ash Wednesday** is on 26 February.

Excluding six Sundays (the five Sundays of Lent and Palm Sunday), it is the first of 40 days before Easter.

A sign of the cross is made on the forehead in ash, to these words: 'Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.

Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.'

We are expected to do everything we can to attend an Ash Wednesday service. At no other time do we experience such an intense confrontation with our frailty. Which is why 'ashing' is only offered on this day: at the 10.00 am and 7.30 pm Eucharists.

The ash comes from the previous year's palm crosses, reflecting the cycle of life, death and renewal.

Lent is sometimes seen as a purely negative exercise – as a grim, extended period of penance. But it is also a way of 'de-toxing' from things that overwhelm and exhaust us.

We need to experience 'the desert' in order discover God afresh, free from distractions. Deserts may seem barren and arid, but they can also be places of freedom and transcendent beauty.

And so Lent is a call to 'letting go'.

Re-directing our energy towards God.

Relaxing into a more intimate and trusting relationship with Christ.

Which is why early in Lent – on 7 March – we will have a Quiet Morning, led by Sr Regula.

Three **Lent** practices help us to deepen our faith.

First, *abstinence* from some form of luxury, as a way of identifying with Christ's 40 day fast in the wilderness.

Abstinence also helps us to face our dependencies, and our temptation to ignore or trivialise poverty, inequality and injustice.

Second, *giving* to the poor.

Third, *prayer and reading*.

We are encouraged to pray more frequently and deeply, and to attend as many acts of worship as possible.

Our Lent book this year is *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, by Henri Nouwen. Some of us may have read this book already, but it is worth reading again, slowly and meditatively.

The book is a rich source of spiritual treasure.

We will discuss it over supper at 6.00 pm on Sunday 29 March.

Mothering Sunday is on the fourth Sunday in Lent.

In the sixteenth century, it was called *Laetere* ('Refreshment') Sunday; a feast to honour the Virgin Mary and Mother Church.

People returned to their family homes and attended mass in the local church or cathedral. In later times, domestic servants were given the day off to visit their mothers.

At All Saints, Mothering Sunday is the day on which some young people aged 7 and upwards will receive their first holy communion.

The fifth Sunday of Lent is known as **Passion Sunday** (from the Greek verb, *paschō*, to suffer). At this point, many churches put purple shrouds on statues and images – to focus on the coming events of Holy Week.

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER

Palm Sunday marks the entry of Christ into Jerusalem, as a King with a difference – arriving on a donkey.

The Parish Eucharist begins with the Blessing of Palms and a procession. While the main theme is Christ's arrival at Jerusalem, we also look ahead. This day invites us to begin the deep interior journey towards Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

In the **first three days** of Holy Week, we travel onward with Christ. The Monday – Wednesday 7.00 pm Eucharists follow the themes of Hospitality ('Bethany'), Contemplation, and Facing Darkness.*

Prepared and fortified by the deep reflection and prayer of the first three days, we arrive at Maundy Thursday.

Maundy Thursday (8.00 pm Eucharist) recalls the Last Supper.

Following Jesus' example, feet are washed, as a reminder of our own call to loving service.

In the Eucharistic Prayer we give thanks for holy communion, initiated by Christ at this final Passover meal with his friends.

The Blessed Sacrament (consecrated bread) is processed to the 'Altar of Repose' in the Lady Chapel.

An all-night vigil then follows in the chapel, which is decorated to recall the Garden of Gethsemane.

This reflects our willingness to 'stay awake' with Christ, even though we are weak and fallible.

'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Matthew 26. 40-41

Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion and death of Christ.

There are two services.

At 12 noon: an all age *Way of the Cross*.

At 1.30 pm: *The Liturgy of the Passion*, which includes

- a Passion Reading with different voices
- sung 'Reproaches' during the Veneration of the Cross
- communion from the Reserved Sacrament, which has been residing in the Lady Chapel.

More information about Holy Week and Easter will follow in due course. In the meantime, please begin to think about how you hope to draw closer to God this Lent.

**Note: the Tuesday Agape ('love' feast) has been transferred to the more suitable time of Pentecost. On 31 May, we will share an Agape lunch, celebrating the community of the church.*