

We seek God's help not our own will power to keep us going, drawing closer to God by showing our love for him. Secondly, we think about how our fasting can help us draw closer to others, by making us less self-centred/more caring. True fasting opens us to a radical dependence on God and greater sensitivity and concern for the needs of others. **Fasting is an act of worship and a way to make the world a better place.**

Reflection/Discussion question: Do I have a healthy understanding of fasting? Have I chosen the right thing to fast from this Lent? Is there anything 'deeper' I need to try?

People often talk about 'taking something on' rather than 'giving something up'? What could this be for you this Lent?

Day 4 Saturday 21st February

Isaiah 58:9-14 - If you pour yourself out for the hungry...



Luke 5:27-32 - I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners...

Jesus' decision to call a tax collector to join his team of disciples sends a powerful message - in God's kingdom, no one is to be looked upon as a reject, an outsider. So if you are already thinking "Maybe Lent's for the 'religious professionals', the 'Holy Joe's' and not for people like me who seem to stumble from one mess to another" - then please think again! Lent is for us all, because we are all sinners and **we all need God's mercy and healing**. The Father of Jesus is the God of many chances, who delights in the return of the prodigal son and daughter. As the song goes: "Ain't no mountain high enough Ain't no valley low enough, Ain't no river wide enough to keep me from gettin' to you."

This way of God's unconditional love for all clashes with the Pharisees' interpretation of holiness as we hear in today's Gospel. They think holiness (i.e. oneness with God) comes from separating ourselves from all that is impure - so they are scandalised by Jesus' taste in table fellowship: tax collectors and sinners. Jesus, in contrast, looks at these 'lost souls' with a compassionate, loving gaze, as sick people in need of a doctor.

Reflect on Matthew's experience on that day when Jesus called him to leave behind his tax collector's booth and set out on a radically different journey. Imagine Jesus' tone of voice, the look in his eyes when he speaks to him... Matthew has known only abuse and hatred for so long - Jesus awakens in him a hope for **a new life**, his true life... Wow!

Reflection/Discussion question: What could Jesus be asking me to leave behind this Lent? Can you imagine Jesus looking at you with eyes of unconditional love?

If I am going to be completely honest (always a good idea!) is there something of a Pharisee in me? Are there any individuals/groups of people I look down on/even despise?

This Lent you are invited to choose a '**prayer partner**' - maybe a friend, a relative, someone you live with, a fellow parishioner... Then use these daily reflection sheets to share with each other something of your Lenten journey.

Meet up at least once a week, maybe every day if you can - in person, on the phone, on-line. Reflect together on how God's Word can be a light for your journey home to God this Lent.

LENT

WALKING WITH CHRIST

Wednesday 18th February 2026

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2: 12-18 - Return to me with all your heart.

Matthew: 6:1-6, 16-18 - When you give to the needy...



Today we are invited by God himself to set out on a journey - a journey back to him (as we hear in the 1st reading from Joel, God calls to us: "Return to me with all your heart.") Jesus gives us a road map for this journey in today's Gospel, when he tells us how we should follow the 3 essential Lenten pathways of **prayer, fasting and almsgiving**. These 3 traditional practices reveal to us how the key relationships of our lives can be renewed and restored. Prayer is the door through which we enter into a deeper relationship with God. Fasting shows us how we need to rethink our relationship to things, especially those that we use to satisfy our appetites. And almsgiving is a key to changing our relationship with others: not just with the poor, but to be charitable to others. We are all fellow pilgrims not competitors.

As we will discover during these 40 days of Lent, this is a journey which Jesus has himself already walked and on which he invites us to walk with him now so that in all things we may learn from him. The first step of the journey is very simple. We just need to recognise that **we need a Saviour!** This means admitting that we cannot save ourselves, no matter how much we try to be in control and shape the world around us according to our will and our way. We still have so much to learn on the journey ahead, and there is still so much from the journey already travelled that we need to bring to God and ask for his healing. **Step one - Jesus, I need you.**

Ash Wednesday is a day for honesty, when we are invited to show our need for God by performing a simple public act of penance and faith. We come to Mass and with

others we take our place in the queue to be marked with the sign of the cross in ashes on our forehead. Ash is a sign of our mortality - as the priest might say to us today: "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." The certainty of death and suffering in our lives puts everything else into a different perspective. But the cross is a sign of hope, a promise of Christ's victory over death and suffering. **Step two - Jesus, I trust in you.**

So, on this first day of our Lenten journey, we are asked to give our 'yes' to God's invitation to grow closer to him, to others and to ourselves. Is this a journey I want to make?

Reflection/Discussion question: How motivated am I to make this Lenten journey, to walk more closely with Christ day by day? Do I recognise my need for a reset in my life? Ask God today to show you how you are to walk these 3 different paths of prayer, fasting and almsgiving this year. How do you think you might put each path into practice?



Day 2 Thursday 19th February

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 *I set before you today life and good, death and evil.*

Luke 9:22-25 - *If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*

Our two readings today are very closely connected. In Deuteronomy, the elderly Moses (120 years old!) teaches the people of Israel **the way to life** as he reflects on all that he has learnt from God over all these years. And in Luke, Jesus also speaks about how we are to choose life. For the Israelites, God's chosen people, the way to life is through faithfully following God's commandments. In the New Testament, the way to life is still through walking faithfully with God, but now the Church - the new community of believers - grows in this faithful relationship not simply by following commandments, but by following God's Son Jesus.

The incredible paradox is that Jesus wins eternal life for us by himself dying on the cross. He gives us freedom by himself taking the place of the slave, the condemned criminal. And this is the path that he invites us to follow if we too want to find the way to life, both here on earth and in eternity. He tells the disciples and us: "Whoever loses their life for my sake will save it." And "If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow me."

"Denying ourselves" does not initially sound like a very appealing proposal! Does this mean somehow making our lives miserable, restricting our freedom, not being true to ourselves? No!! You are a beloved child of God. Your life is a precious gift willed by God, for your good and the good of others. But we have a tendency to make everything revolve around ourselves. Everything becomes about us - my way, my will, what others can do for me... This self-centred ego is what needs to die, so that we can rediscover our true self.

This means that we need to bring God back to where he should be - at the centre of our lives, and then we reflect his love for us by giving ourselves generously in love and service of others. For some this will mean caring for their child/children (especially perhaps if they have extra needs). For others there is the call to support an aged or sick parent/relative. This can be a long and very demanding path, on which we may really struggle at times ('What about me!'), but when the journey is complete, we look back and see clearly that this has been one of the greatest privileges of our lives. We understand so much better what is really important in life and what is not through this journey of **sacrifice and service**.

Reflection/Discussion question: How do you think God is calling you at this time to give your life more generously to him and to others?

What have been some of the most meaningful/life-giving experiences of your life?



Day 3 Friday 20th February

Isaiah 58:1-9 - *Is not this the fast that I choose...*

Matthew 9:14-15 - *The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away..., and then they will fast.*

Today's readings help us to reflect deeper on the Lenten pathway of **fasting**. This could be very good timing as we may already be struggling with headaches from giving up coffee or intense sugar cravings if we have chosen to give up chocolate/sweets. If we simply see our fasting as a test of our will power, then we probably won't even make it to the first weekend of Lent!

It's interesting that the first question people usually ask you about Lent is "What are you giving up?" Fasting is important but if we are not careful it can become the focus of our Lenten journey, rather than what is behind it. Jesus obviously saw great value in fasting - he spent 40 days in the desert praying and fasting in preparation for his public ministry. Yet he often met people who had become overly fixated on external religious practices but had lost touch with the meaning of those practices. The prophet Isaiah deals with the same problem in our first reading - "Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers." No, no, no! The kind of fast that pleases God involves setting the oppressed free and reaching out to those in need.

So today's readings invite us to think about **not the 'what' but the 'why'** of our fasting. Firstly, we should be fasting from things that lead us away from God - eg obsessive scrolling on our phones/unhealthy eating habits/pornography/gossip...