

DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON



PASTORAL LETTER FOR LENT 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man.” Do those words of St Peter in today’s Gospel resonate as much with you - as they do with me? Isaiah in the first reading was also conscious of his wretched state in the presence of the **all-holy** God.

Am I worthy to be a baptised brother or sister of Jesus? Do I live and speak and act in harmony with Jesus?

But the Lord has chosen us. All of us who are baptised are called to holiness. And yet how often am I blind to God’s grace and give way to temptation. Sometimes our sinfulness can make us feel helpless and hopeless. No wonder those words of St Peter strike such a chord!

The Lord’s love for us is everlasting, and his mercy is forever sure. The Lord is always there to lift us up. This Year of Mercy is to help us to keep that hope before us - every day.

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, a day of fasting and abstinence. The day marks the beginning of the season of Lent. “So soon after Christmas,” I hear you say. But it is a wonderful opportunity for prayer **and** fasting **and** self-denial – a programme of training for all of us who are trying to be faithful to the life given to us at baptism. It is also a time to accompany and to support those in our parishes who are preparing to be baptised or received into the Church at Easter.

During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, join me in living this season of Lent more intensely. It is a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God’s mercy. Let us open our hearts to his spirit to convert us and renew us in prayer **and** in acts of charity and self-denial.

To celebrate the mercy of God, I am coming to the Pastoral Area during Lent for a Penitential Service. I do hope that you will join me, and that you will bring some family and friends. Together we can be attentive to God's word in our lives. Together we can pray before the Blessed Sacrament. And perhaps it may be an opportunity to rejoice in God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Confession. **The Penitential Service for our area is on 15 March at St Joseph's in Midland Road, Bedford. We will also have our own parish service on 21 March with Fr. Bennie and Fr. Richard in attendance.**

During Lent, I have asked the Pastoral Areas to find ways of putting into practise the Pope's initiative called "24 hours for the Lord" on Friday and Saturday, 4 and 5 March. At some time during those two days there will be Adoration and a priest available for Confession in one or other of the churches in your Pastoral Area. (This is taking place here at Sacred Heart, Flitwick) As Pope Francis has written, *"so many people, including young people, are returning to the Sacrament of Reconciliation; through this experience they are rediscovering a path back to the Lord, living a moment of intense prayer, and finding meaning in their lives."*

To encourage us in our Lenten response and involvement, there is good news this weekend. We have a new priest. Father Brendan Seery was ordained this Saturday morning. This coming Thursday a Cathedral parishioner, who is discerning a call to the contemplative life, is entering the Notting Hill Carmel. Please pray for them both. Pray for those preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage this year and, as I mentioned earlier, pray for those being baptised or received into the Church at Easter. I look forward to seeing them at the Rite of Election in the Cathedral next Sunday.

May this Lent in the Jubilee Year of Mercy be a special moment of grace for each of us and for the whole Diocese.

With every blessing,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Peter". The plus sign is on the left, followed by a stylized 'P' and the name 'eter'.

Bishop of Northampton

*To be read and/or made available at all Masses of
the weekend of the Fifth Ordinary Sunday of the Year,
6/7 February 2016.*