



**APPOINTED TO BE READ AT ALL PUBLIC MASSES IN ALL CHURCHES AND CHAPELS IN THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER ON THE WEEKEND OF 8-9 March 2025**

Pastoral Letter First Sunday of Lent 2025.

My dear people,

With the placing of the blessed ash on our foreheads we have begun once more the Holy Season of Lent, remembering that we are dust, and into dust we will one day return. We may be familiar with Lent, with its penances, its call to more heartfelt prayer and its call to share more generously with the poor, but this is a new Lent for us all. We are asked not merely to repeat what we have done before, but to go deeper into the life of Christ. The world has changed over these past twelve months, not all for the better, and we too have all grown older.

Let us take a moment to pray for our Holy Father, Pope Francis, as he continues to struggle with poor health and the frailty of his years. He still leads us. His example is a rich lesson in Christian discipleship.

Above all, it is Jesus Himself who claims our attention, it always is. As we see Him head off alone into the wild, inhospitable places, let us remember with humility that He does this for each of us. In a true sense, He takes each of us with Him. It is for our good that He does battle with the devil. He overcame His temptations out of hope that we would each come to realise not so much what He has done, but why He has done it.

Am I worth this? After all the good I have wasted, the indifference I have shown, the selfishness that has pervaded my life – and my prayers – am I worth this? His answer is, yes, you are.

What for me would be a successful Lent? Is it to simply keep my resolutions to do without something I enjoy, to spend more time in prayer, to 'be nicer to others'? Surely what will count is not what I achieve in these disciplines – worthy though they are – but to comprehend a little more deeply why it is worth bothering.

There is much that is wrong in the world. I don't need to go into any detail – you didn't come to Mass to dwell on problems. You are already all too well aware of them. Nor do you need reminding that there is much wrong with each of us too. We have others to remind us of that fact!

We come to be reminded of Grace, of the love God has for even the most persistent, wayward of His children. We come to be reminded that there is more to us than we

know, and that the Good Lord has not lost sight of His little ones, nor has He lost Hope that we may yet reach with Him the place of safety, of true and lasting peace, in the arms of the loving Father. He will not allow the tempter to convince Him, or us, that we are a lost cause. But see what it cost Him.

In the wilderness He refused to perform miracles that might have made life easier for Himself, given Him just a little comfort (no one was watching, no one would know). Later, after His return to society, He would perform miracles, but the purpose of all His miracles was not to solve people's problems or even to relieve their misfortunes. The true purpose of each miracle was that people might know who He is, and to give them hope, that neither this life, nor their own achievements – so fleeting- could ever give.

I address you as people of Faith, as people who are open to receiving Grace. Imperfect as we are, in this Jubilee year, and also marking the Centenary of the Diocese, we are given new hope that God's will may be done, even in us. We leave Him to be the judge of what is real success.

I reflect on how Mary must have been aware of what her son was doing when He seemed to turn His back on society. She understood as no one else could, and was inflicted with constant, daily reminders of Him by His very absence from the home He had until this moment, shared with her. Simeon's words must have haunted each day as she remembered – *'and a sword shall pierce your own soul too.'* This is the way of the cross, but can it also be the way to heaven?

May this Season of Lent refresh our Faith in a way that has not happened for us before. May we think first of what He has done for us, not what we can do for Him – that will follow in due course. May we be drawn to the beautiful Sacrament of penance where we meet the Lord in a kind of desolation, a true wilderness, and yet experience an enchanting intimacy with Jesus that changes the burden of stones into the taste of freshly baked bread! There is a way of living our Faith that saps our strength. Jesus shows us another way, a way that feeds us and gives us strength. Let us set ourselves to follow His way, confident that it will lead us to Easter and the tomb, with the stone rolled away.

With my blessing,

+ Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick  
**Bishop of Lancaster**