

A Coffee with Alessio



AMDG

Welcome to Lent 2021

This past Wednesday being Ash Wednesday marked for us the beginning of Lent, so I hope you got to eat your pancakes on Tuesday. The Ash Wednesday liturgy was different and the liturgy will be different for the next six weeks – no Alleluia at all, no Gloria on the Sundays of Lent, perhaps no hymn at the end of Mass and the priest wearing violet vestments. Even the prayers and readings have a completely different tone to them.

In the First Reading on Ash Wednesday we heard from the prophet Joel:

“Now, now, - it is the Lord who speaks –
Come back to me with all your heart,
fasting, weeping, mourning.”

Our Lenten journey began with ashes being sprinkled on our heads – a different practice than that which we have become used to. However, the sprinkling of ashes on our head has its origins in Scripture. The practice of putting on sackcloth and ashes as a sign of repentance is mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament and Jesus Himself referred to ashes when he spoke of the towns that refused to repent of sin, even though they had witnessed the miracles of Jesus and the Gospel. He said: “If the miracles worked in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have reformed in sackcloth and ashes long ago.” (Matthew 11:21)

[\(https://catholicstraightanswers.com/what-are-the-origins-of-ash-wednesday-and-the-use-of-ashes/\)](https://catholicstraightanswers.com/what-are-the-origins-of-ash-wednesday-and-the-use-of-ashes/)

The ashes are a sign of cleansing. You might ask yourself, how can ashes be used for cleansing when they dirtied my hair?” The ashes sprinkled on our head remind us of our need to change during this time of Lent. Just as Jesus went into the desert for forty days and forty nights, so too are we spending these forty days of Lent with more prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Lent is a time to forget about ourselves and turn back to Lord and focus on our neighbour.

So, what can we do during Lent to help us in our works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving?

I like to think of Lent as a bit of a stocktake sale or wardrobe renewal. Recently, I did a bit of wardrobe renewal and it was the last week of the summer stock coming in. The

next week all the winter stock was coming in. So, I missed out on a couple of those Egyptian Cotton shirts which are great in summer since they are about three degrees cooler than the cotton shirts. So, we really need to use this time of Lent wisely so that we don't miss out on the opportunities to pray, fast and give alms. During stocktake sales retailers try to clear everything out to make way for new stock – much like my wardrobe renewal program. Getting rid of old clothes that no longer fit or that I won't use to make space for some new things. So it is with Lent. We need to declutter our lives, homes and workspaces of all the things we don't need. When our lives, homes and workspaces are decluttered we actually have room and space to think and see what is in front of us. We can find things. Let us use this time of Lent to get rid of all the things we don't need, so that we can use our time to pray, to fast from things we really don't need and share with our neighbour in need. In this way we will return to the Lord with all heart. Our works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving ought not to be actions of going through the motions, but rather actions of sincerity and commitment as we pray, fast and give alms. Speaking of clothing and wardrobe renewal, I need to get my purple shirts out to wear to Mass. I like to wear the liturgical colour of the day. Some people think I'm nuts – but I really don't care. I think wearing the liturgical colour of the day helps us to focus on what we are celebrating in the liturgy that particular day.

My prayer list is a rather long one – some are for my own intentions and some are for others. This Lent, I really need to pray for others first and then my own intentions. There really are so many people in need and so I must commit those people, their needs and their intentions to prayer.

Fasting. The topic of fasting seems to be somewhat contentious these days. I think as a society we really don't like going without things. Now I'm not suggesting we go back to the dark ages, but we probably do have more than we really need or will use these days. As you know I am a big fan of cakes – so that is probably something I should cut right back on for Lent. Time seems to be an ever-precious resources these days. Life goes at a million miles an hour and all the things we had planned to get done in a day just seem to go out the window. Pastoral care is an important part of the Christian way of life, and it has so much more meaning when we are doing works of pastoral care in the time we don't have as a opposed to the time we do. When we do works of pastoral care for our neighbour, the Lord will smile on us, for we are really doing them for Him. Making a coffee for someone, asking them are they ok, sending them a text to see how they are going, or making someone smile are simple but effective ways of showing pastoral care and showing someone that the Lord is truly present in the world.

Pastoral care ties in so well with almsgiving, because using our time of give of ourselves for someone else is a gift that truly reflects the goodness of God. There are other ways of course we can give to our neighbour and Project Compassion is one way.

I think one practical action we can undertake during Lent which brings all three facets of Lent together is to invite someone to Mass who hasn't been for a while. Let's not leave it at just Mass, but extend that to having a coffee and something to eat with them afterwards. At the Lord's Altar we gather to worship Him, to be strengthened by His Word and to be nourished by His Body and Blood when we receive Holy Communion. So it is in our fellowship. Just as Jesus extends his hospitality to us in the Mass, we can show hospitality to our friend whom we have invited to Mass and share a coffee with

them. In this way just as we gather for worship we gather for fellowship. We share stories and conversation and enjoy each other's company, just say we listen to the Lord's Word. Finally, we have a coffee and food, and are nourished by the food and drink, just as we are nourished by the Body and Blood of the Lord Himself.

So, I hope this week's column gives us all some practical ways in which we can have a fruitful Lent. If we take care of others the Lord will take care of us. Inviting someone to come to Mass with us is a risk, but so are so many other things we do in life. Take a risk and see where it goes. The Lord will guide our undertakings.

Just before I wrap up this week's column, I can't help but mention that on Wednesday was the Feast day of the Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order. Ash Wednesday takes precedence over all feast days including those that celebrate founders of Religious Orders. I'm sure the Servite Friars would have celebrated this feast day on another day. Our Archdiocese has been blessed and enriched by the presence of the Servite Friars since 1951. Since then, they have worked in parishes, schools and other apostolates. To the Servite Friars, we give thanks to God for your work in this Archdiocese and we thank Him that so many took the risk to come to this land down under all those years ago. May God's blessings be with you!

May the Lord bless you during this Season of Lent as we enter into the desert with Him, so that we can rise joyfully with Him on Easter Sunday. Then, as we take up the Alleluia and organ music in the liturgy, we can take something up again that we have forsaken during this time of Lent. The Easter Eggs which are a symbol of new life will have even more meaning on Easter Sunday if we do Lent well, because hopefully we will be a new and better person (because of what we have done during Lent). I'm looking forward to some Baci chocolates on Easter Sunday.

As for coffee and cake this week, since I'm cutting back on my desserts for the Lenten season, a flat white and a fruit toast at Miss Maud's is my suggestion for this week.

Till next week, enjoy your coffee and cake!

Alessio Loiacono
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