

Father Philip's Address to St Paul's Assembly

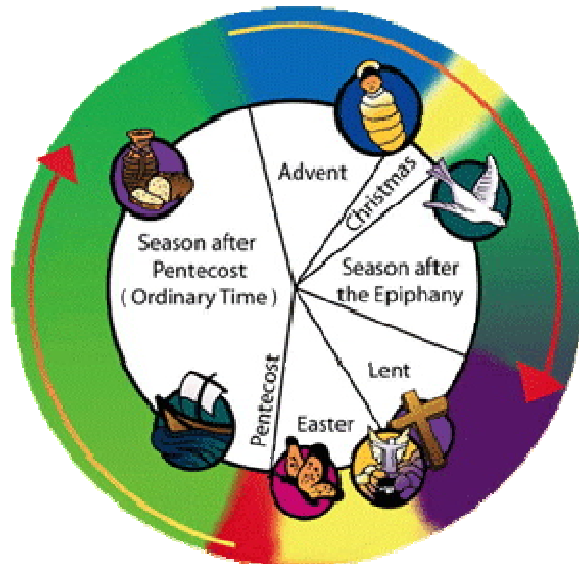
6th March 2014

Theme for the week: Lent

Matthew 6 : 1-6, 16-18

Yesterday was Ash Wednesday and we entered the season of Lent. Forty days before Holy Week, the week in which we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey, holding his Last Supper, being betrayed, arrested, tried and crucified, before rising to new life on Easter Day.

It is a yearly celebration and part of the cycle of the Church Year.



This simple diagram shows the makeup of the Church Year. It begins at the top with Advent at the end of November and through December. In our Assemblies at Advent we looked at John the Baptist, Mary and the idea of Expectation.

Advent is the season before Christmas, which we celebrated with our Christmas Carol Service.

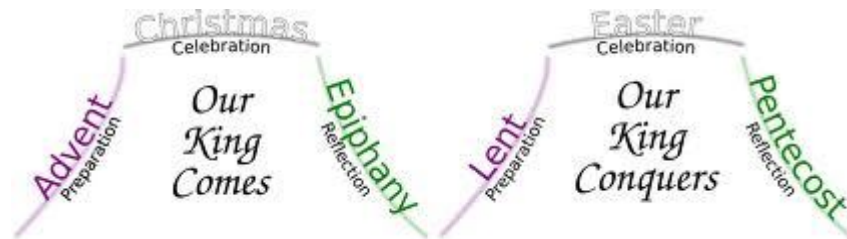
We returned from our holidays after Christmas, in the season of Epiphany and the time after Epiphany. At Assembly we considered three different Epiphanies: The

Baptism of Jesus; The First Miracle of Jesus changing water into wine and the Wise Men bringing their gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh to Jesus.

We now enter into the season of Lent, which takes us into Easter, then Pentecost when we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit and finally the long season of Ordinary Time which ends with the Feast of Christ the King and a new year begins again at the top with Advent.

Through the year we celebrate other feasts, All Saints, All Souls, the birth and the death of saints and other events.

But at the centre of the Christian year are those two great feasts, Christmas and Easter. The birth of Jesus and the Resurrection of Jesus after his death.



Christmas is the celebration in which we recall how our King, Jesus, comes to us. God takes flesh as a baby and is born to a woman, to live and die like us.

Easter is the celebration in which we recall how our King, Jesus, conquers. He conquers death and evil. He gives us the promise of eternal life.

Both Christmas and Easter have a period of preparation to them, a season where we get ready spiritually and physically for the feast.

For Christmas, it is the season of Advent, for Easter it is this season of Lent.

And both Christmas and Easter also have a period of reflection after them, after we have celebrated.

For Christmas it is the Epiphany celebration when we think about how Jesus showed himself in many ways and continues to show himself to us now.

For Easter is the Pentecost celebration when we give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit and consider how, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Church grew in numbers. We have a vocation to build up the Church in our own day.

So we do not celebrate Christmas or Easter without some sort of PREPARATION.

Preparation is vital in everything that we do. In our work, in our home and family life, at school, in our pastimes, we need to prepare if we are to make the best of it.

All scouts here will know of the importance of preparation. The founder of the scouting movement, Baden Powell, gave the motto “Be prepared”. He explained that motto as the importance for all scouts to be prepared in mind and to be prepared in body.

Likewise, Confucius said that “In all things success depends upon previous preparation, and without such previous preparation there is sure to be failure”.

Preparation, be it for any sporting event, for examinations, for cooking or for music, drama, writing, traveling, car maintenance and so much more is, as they say, the Key to success.

Jesus himself prepared for his ministry, his work. We don't know anything about what Jesus did between the age of about 12 and 30.

But at the age of about 30, Jesus went into the desert for forty days and forty nights and PREPARED himself. He prepared himself for his ministry. For the teaching that he was going to do, for the miracles that he would perform and for his eventual suffering, death and resurrection.

What is true of the ministry of Jesus, what is true of everything that we do in our daily lives, is also true of our spiritual life.

We must have preparation. If we do not, we will most likely fail.

As I have already mentioned, yesterday was Ash Wednesday. It was a day when we began our preparation for Holy Week and Easter.

At the Eucharist yesterday the sign of the cross was made on the forehead of those present with Ash. A sign that we are all mortal, and that we must turn from sin and live the life of the Gospel.

Without our Lenten preparation for Easter, Easter will mean very little. We need to prepare ourselves spiritually and physically to celebrate such a great feast.

How can we prepare ourselves in Lent?

Well, there are three ways.

Commonly known as Prayer, Fasting and Charity.

Firstly, Prayer. As I said last week, if we do not spend time with God, how can we come to know our vocation?

In the same way, if we do not pray, if we do not spend time with God to prepare ourselves for Easter, how can we truly celebrate it?

So over the next forty days until Holy Week and Easter, pray. Spend a bit more time in prayer.

Perhaps you may decide to attend one of the Eucharists in the Chapel on a Tuesday at 1.00 pm during lunch or Thursday at 3.45 pm after School.

Perhaps you may wish to join the Christian Union Prayer Group.

Perhaps you may wish to join the Junior or Senior Christian Union Groups.

Perhaps you may spend some time each day in the quiet of our Chapel, or at home, or in Church.

Secondly, Fasting. Over the next forty days give up something. Many people do not eat meat on Fridays. Perhaps there are some foods that you particularly like that you could give up over the next forty days.

By saying no to something which you don't really need, you are denying yourself. You are starting a process of saying that you can be in control of your life. If you can do something small like give up something to eat, just think of the bigger things you can control.

We are called to reach out to others, to think about them first.

Which leads us onto the third way.

Charity, or Almsgiving or Acts of love. Are there ways over the next forty days that you can show God's love in different ways.

Perhaps you may deny yourself some things and put that money to charity. Perhaps you may give your time to help others around you: a classmate who is struggling, a friend who needs help.

Lent is a season where the Church invites us to do what we should be doing anyway. To spend time with God, to think about what is really important and not to live a life of greed and to reach out to those who are in need.

By doing these three things we can begin to focus on God more closely and be better prepared to celebrate the joy of God's love to us.

In the days and weeks ahead, think about what is truly important in life. Give thanks to God for the sacrifice of Jesus and the love he has shown to us and show that love to those around you.

Thank you.

**Almighty God,
guide us throughout this Lent
so that all we do
may be out of love for you and our neighbour.
Through your goodness and mercy
you have given us this holy season
as a time for us to turn to you.
May our hearts be strengthened
in faith, hope and love
as we remember
the life, death and resurrection
of our saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.**